



MLK PARK NEIGHBORHOOD PRELIMINARY QUALITY OF LIFE IMPROVEMENT STUDY

A STUDY FUNDED BY THE NEIGHBORHOOD ECONOMIC CONNECTIONS GRANT
FROM THE W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION

Principle Author: Latesha Lipscomb, JD
Design & Development Planning Division

Project Manager: Jordoun Eatman
Grand Rapids Neighborhood Connectors/ 616.456.4397/ grnc@grcity.us



DRAFT0

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The City of Grand Rapids thanks all of the people who live, work, and play in the MLK Park Neighborhood that were a part of this process and made a positive contribution to this body of work; including, but not limited to, the MLK Park residents, neighbors, community leaders, and additional neighborhood stakeholders.

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS LEAD STAFF

- Stacy Stout
- Jordoun Eatman
- Latesha Lipscomb, JD

MLK PARK NEIGHBORHOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- Bryan Blakely
- Jordoun Eatman
- Karie Enriquez
- Victoria Graves
- John Judnich
- Latesha Lipscomb, JD
- Courtney Magaluk, AICP
- David Marquardt
- Suzanne Schulz, AICP
- Stacy Stout
- Catherine Zietse

QUALITY OF LIFE NEIGHBORHOOD CANVASSERS

- Bryan Blakely
- Earl Divine Booker
- Carol Nash
- Sheila Ewing
- Sifa Grace
- Antoine Loyd
- Regina Brooks
- Paula Anderson
- Kenneth Thomas
- Jaylene Smith

PARK IMPROVEMENTS & ACTIVATION WORK GROUP

- Lead Facilitator(s): Latesha Lipscomb, JD
- Marian Barrera-Young
- Rita Early
- Carrie Elzinga
- Karie Enriquez
- John Garbini
- AC Gilmore
- Dana Knight
- Beloved McCastle
- Angela Rainey
- Mary Robinson
- Lillian Howell Bell White

NEIGHBORHOOD BUILDING WORK GROUP

- Lead Facilitator(s):
Ciara C. Adkins, JD & Matthew Downey, Principal, Matthew Downey Consulting, LLC.
- Paul Belcher
- Mae Black
- Theresa Cesar
- Rita Early
- Dan Elzinga
- Shelby Garbini
- Gordon Griffin
- Julie Griffin
- Michael Harris
- Beverly Ivy
- Marci Lewandowski Jenkins
- Christina McPike-Rector
- Ijalal Nuriddin
- Angela Rainey
- Tino Scott
- Jenn Victor

- Florine Woods

DRAFT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION TO THE MLK QUALITY OF LIFE IMPROVEMENT STUDY	#
INTRODUCTION	#
VISION STATEMENT / VALUES	#
VALUES	#
PURPOSE & INTENT	#
QOL SUMMARY TIMELINE	#
PROCESS OVERVIEW	#
PART 1: FILL IN THE BLANKS	#
DISAGGREGATED DATA AND RESIDENT VOICE	#
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS & TAKEAWAYS	#
PART 2: PROJECT REIMAGINE: THE FUTURE STATE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD	#
CHAPTER 2 – QOL WORK GROUP FOCUS AREAS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	#
NEIGHBORHOOD BUILDING	#
PARK IMPROVEMENTS & ACTIVATION	#
RECURRING NEIGHBORHOOD THEMES AND CHALLENGES	#
CHAPTER 3 – LESSONS LEARNED, FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS	#
TRANSFORMING ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERING RESIDENTS: COLLECTIVE IMPACT AND THE MLK PARK COMMUNITY TOOLBOX	#
2019-2021 QOL ACTIVITY MATRIX	#
LESSONS LEARNED AND CONCLUSIONS	#
CHAPTER 4 - APPENDICES	#
MLK PARK NEIGHBORHOOD BOUNDARIES MAP	#
NEIGHBORHOOD VISION STATEMENTS	#
COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS	#
MLK PARK NEIGHBORHOOD MINI-REPORT	#
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLS	#
PARK IMPROVEMENT IMAGES	#
NEIGHBORHOOD BUILDING FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS	#
CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS MLK PARK CAPITAL INVESTMENTS	#
PARK IMPROVEMENTS & ACTIVATION FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS	#
FUTURE STATE OF MLK PARK LODGE RESULTS	#
SAMPLE PREDATORY SOLICITATION LETTER	#
MLK PARK LIST OF EVENTS – PARK AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT	#
MEDIA, PRESS COVERAGE AND WEB LINKS	#

01

INTRODUCTION TO THE MLK PARK NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY OF LIFE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

The Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) Park Neighborhood is located on the southeast side of the city in the third ward, generally bounded by Franklin / Hall Street to Kalamazoo / Adams Street (north-south) and Eastern Street to Giddings / Philadelphia Street (west-east). (See Appendix 1 for Boundary Map). The neighborhood has a rich history that is a source of pride for many neighbors. There are a large number of home-owners and long-term residents in this neighborhood as well as newer residents, creating a diverse, caring, and welcoming community. Long-term residents believe that their homes in the neighborhood contribute to a historical character, and the neighborhood is generally regarded by new-comers to be safe and clean. However, issues like community mistrust, predatory home-buying solicitation, inadequate funding support from community stakeholders, and the absence of a neighborhood association, needed to support resident voice, organize regular events and implement programming, have made it difficult for this neighborhood to thrive. This final report does not necessarily reflect the entirety of the MLK Park Neighborhood, but rather the core area of concern.



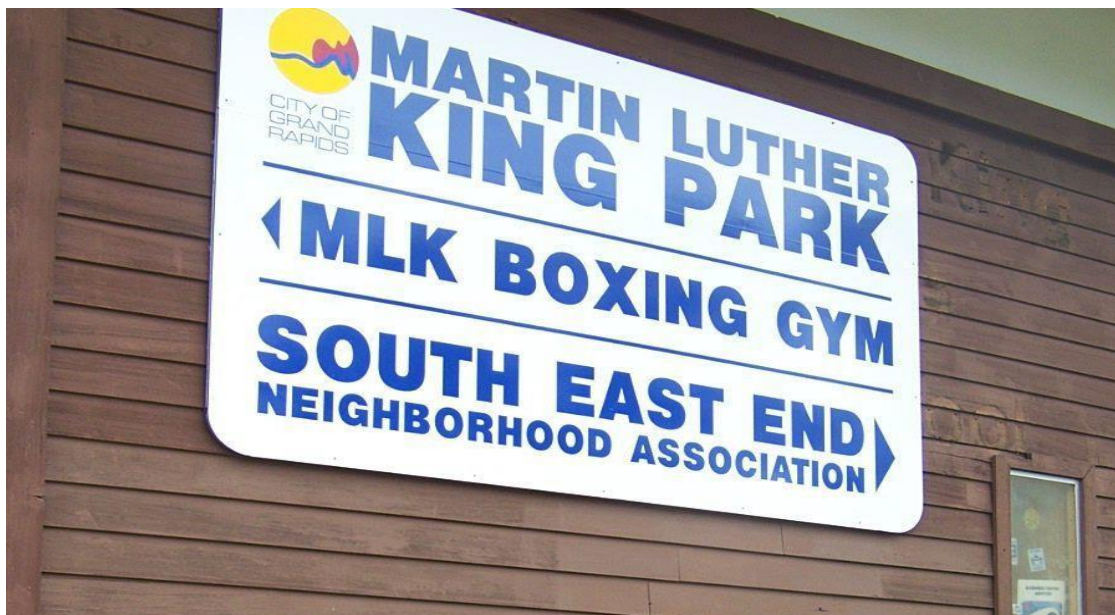
Over the past several years, changes have become evident in the neighborhood. New residents have fueled concerns around gentrification of the neighborhood. At the same time, long-term residents struggle to overcome a history of inequity, being disregarded and often underfunded. Residents have seldom been given an opportunity to speak up for themselves or work together to advance mutual interests through involvement in a planning process. Because of this history and the changes occurring, it was important to provide a platform to build up resident voice through authentic, inclusionary community engagement. Specifically, the City of Grand Rapids wanted to better understand quality of life in the neighborhood, work alongside residents to develop actionable steps to help improve their experiences, and support them with self-leadership and representation moving forward.

In 2017, the City of Grand Rapids received a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to promote employment and career pathways for residents by developing an infrastructure within the city and in neighborhoods where residents can connect to employers, workforce partners and community/economic development entities to improve the economic conditions of families and neighborhoods. The MLK Park Neighborhood was identified as one of the key areas of focus under this grant. In order to accomplish this work, the Neighborhood Connectors initiative was established under the City's Executive Office.

In January 2018, the Neighborhood Connectors began canvassing a 117 block area of the MLK Park neighborhood to inform residents about upcoming programming and opportunities to “be the change” they wished to see in their neighborhood. A host of listening sessions, trainings and block club meetings began to unfold in the neighborhood. Based on resident feedback, the boundaries of the outreach were expanded by 52 blocks, additional canvassers were engaged, and resident leadership training was extended. This groundwork was critical to begin to build resident voice and leadership capacity in the neighborhood. The culmination of this first phase resulted in a total of 169 blocks canvassed, the development of seven strong and active block clubs in the neighborhood, as well as a broader group of residents open to continued involvement.

February 2019, phase two was initiated. This phase focused on further building the neighborhood's capacity for self-leadership, including creation of a document that captured the vision of the neighborhood and an action plan to guide the formation of a formal neighborhood association. The City's Planning Department was engaged to help design the process and facilitate engagement and drafting of the report. The City's Parks and Recreation Department also became a partner in this collaborative effort, given the prominence of MLK Park in the neighborhood and its opportunity to act as a catalyst for positive improvements. This effort is known as the Quality of Life Improvement Study (Quality of Life) and is chronicled in this final report. This document is intended to be a preliminary case study that focuses narrowly on neighborhood building through the creation of a formal association and park improvements specified by participating residents and neighbors.

Through the Quality of Life process, the City wanted to intentionally engage long-term neighbors of color who had not previously been a part of the process, affirm the feedback derived during our initial engagement with the neighborhood, and obtain confirmation on certain decisions related to park improvements and activation that had been contemplated by residents in the past. Barack Obama once said, "We are the change we have been waiting for" and this final report outlines a resident-centric plan that was birthed by neighbors, for neighbors. It seamlessly blends environmental, economic and social equity goals to promote vitality and sustainability in a resource-rich neighborhood that deserves revitalization.



REIMAGINE



YOUR



NEIGHBORHOOD



MLK PARK
NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY OF LIFE
IMPROVEMENT STUDY 2019

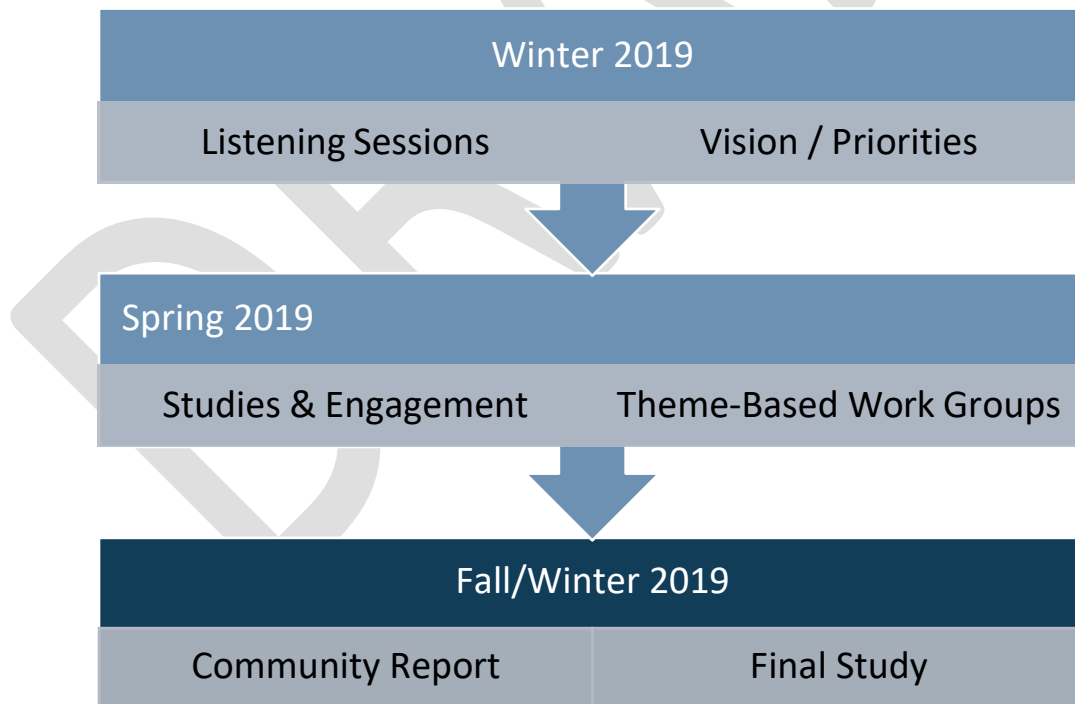
PURPOSE & INTENT

The Quality of Life Study process was created to be a multi-layered framework for neighbors, fostering participation and involvement in a way that would not only positively impact experiences, based on urban planning and design, but that would also produce increased, equitable outcomes for all. Our goals for the MLK Park Neighborhood were derived out of the desire to lift-up resident voice, build leadership capacity and to organize the power of the community to create and advocate for change from within. Through this process, the City of Grand Rapids sought to hear from a wide variety of stakeholders and expand neighborhood voice.

It was also designed to enable residents to develop mutual understanding and create a new shared vision for the future. As a final product, we wished for residents to identify collaborative, community-based solutions and defined measurable outcomes for those recommendations.

The intent was to empower neighborhood champions to work toward improving quality of life for *all* who live, work, and play in the MLK Park Neighborhood. It is through innovative community engagement practices like “Quality of Life” that the MLK Park neighbors can successfully foster community ownership of the process and will be able to successfully carry the work through to implementation.

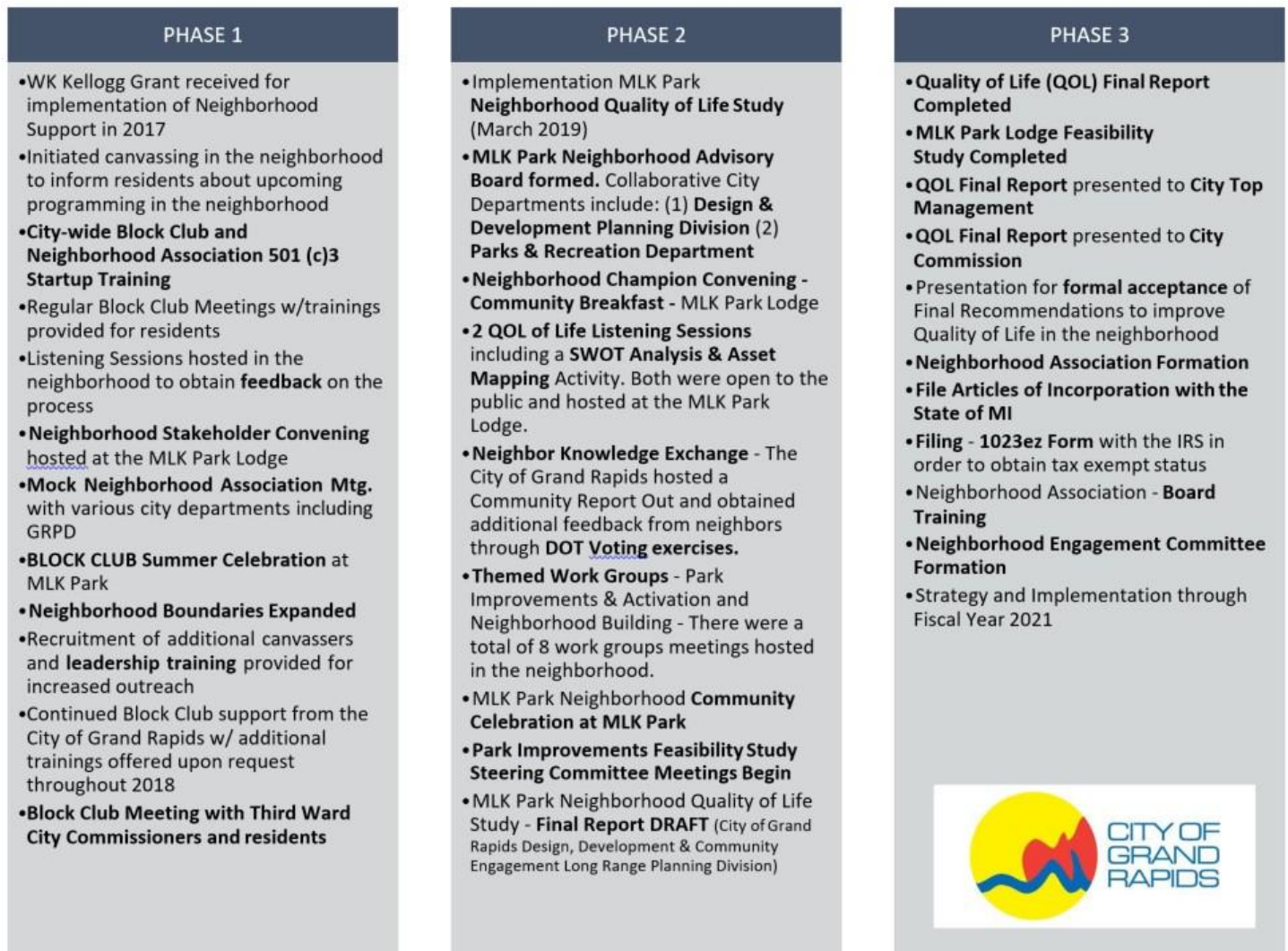
QUALITY OF LIFE SUMMARY TIMELINE



PROCESS OVERVIEW

The MLK Park Neighborhood Quality of Life Study was an innovative and multi-faceted approach to re-engaging the neighborhood and understanding how various people experience life in this community. The goal was to engage residents through active listening, visioning exercises, and prioritization of the communities' vision into concrete recommendations. Equally important was creating a process that was intentionally designed to be inclusive and accessible to all members of the MLK Park community.

MLK PARK NEIGHBORHOOD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS DIAGRAM



Listening Sessions

In order to create a study that reflected the voice of MLK Park Neighborhood residents, the advisory team wanted to begin Phase 2 by listening to current and former residents, business owners, leaders from near neighborhoods, and others who have vested interests in the MLK Park area. Each listening session agenda called on participants to identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats (SWOT Analysis), and provided time for facilitated discussion as well as open dialogue amongst neighbors. Three sessions were held, beginning in February 2019 at the MLK Park Lodge. Through these meetings, we were able to hear from and document over 100 voices in the MLK Park community. Of those voices, 41 were identified as current residents of the MLK Park community, with the remainder

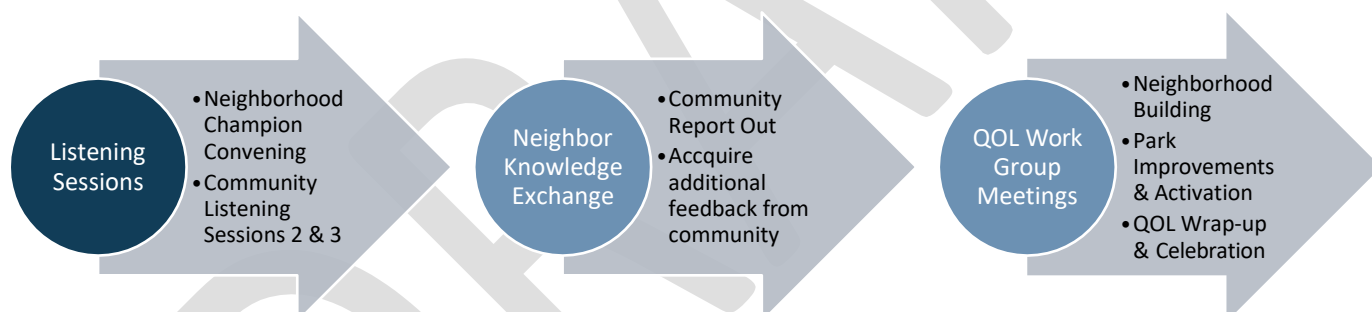
comprised of former residents, those from nearby neighborhoods (such as Baxter), and other stakeholders who have experienced the neighborhood.

Session 1: Neighborhood Champion Convening

The City of Grand Rapids wanted to empower more people in the neighborhood not only to become a part of the planning process, but also to build stronger relationships with various City departments. It was equally important to circle back to make sure that more voices from people of color were represented during this part of the process particularly because the voices of some long-term or historical residents had been muted in the past. Based on this, we began with a neighborhood champion convening where we intentionally invited residents of color that had been living in the neighborhood for at least 10 years to help create people-based solutions to accommodate all neighbors in the MLK Park community. This was our opportunity to not only work alongside these vital community members but to ultimately become accountable to them as well. It was critical that we designed a process that enabled residents to be participants while the City listened carefully to their descriptions of the lived experiences they desire. Many of the neighbors that attended this initial champion convening continued to participate throughout the process.

Sessions 2 & 3: Community Listening Sessions

The remaining two sessions were open invitation, with the intent to reach as many neighborhood residents as possible. We designed promotional materials that were mailed to residences, distributed by canvassers in the neighborhood, and we promoted the sessions on the City of Grand Rapids Facebook page to engage and inform neighbors. These included a Breakfast of Champions listening session on a Saturday morning and a Community Dinner on a Thursday night. These sessions followed the same format of the Neighborhood Champion Convening, including SWOT Analysis and facilitated discussions.



Neighborhood Knowledge Exchange

Affirmation is necessary in order to authentically lift up resident voice, maintain community interest, and create alignment for the journey ahead, all working together to provide process transparency. After the Quality of Life listening sessions, neighbors were invited back together for a Neighborhood Knowledge Exchange. This was an open-house style event, held on March 18th and attended by over 50 people from the community.

The purpose of this meeting was to provide a report out on the information gathered from those sessions and ask, “Did we get it right?” The Neighbor Knowledge Exchange event was also an opportunity for residents to participate in new activities which helped prioritize information gathered in the listening sessions and determine next steps. These activities included asset mapping (where neighbors were asked to share their skills), additional fact gathering on areas of improvement in the neighborhood, and dot voting activities where neighbors were asked to vote on themes that resonated most with them based on exercises from the listening session. When the work group phase began, the neighbors were eager to make a positive contribution to the work, feeling that they were a part of the process and a valued piece of the puzzle.

Work Group Meetings

Following the listening sessions we were ready to begin the next phase of the Quality of Life study. This study and engagement phase provided for two important working groups with the following themes:

Neighborhood Building - The purpose of this work group was to build resident voice and leadership capacity by creating a neighborhood association with diverse representation from various stakeholders in the neighborhood.

Park Improvements & Activation – The purpose of this work group was to build and support community engagement and serve as an ad hoc committee under the neighborhood association to monitor developments and park improvements in the neighborhood. This work group will also play a vital role in planning MLK Park events that bring people together.

We exceeded our goal of 6-8 people for each work group and were able to engage 29 neighbors, each eager to do their part. The work groups met bi-weekly for eight sessions, beginning in March. Meetings were held at MLK Park Lodge and at Life Quest Ministries. The Work groups began by drafting guiding principles and developing and understanding mission, vision, and values. They were provided Decision-Action Logs for the purpose of tracking their roles and responsibilities. They were also given a spreadsheet where they would ultimately draft final recommendations for the City of Grand Rapids and other stakeholders to take into consideration as funding becomes available and development decisions are being made. The final recommendations spreadsheet provided residents an opportunity to draft and revise final recommendations to improve quality of life in the neighborhood. It also challenged them to think about key partner and ownership organizations, a timeline and measurements of success.

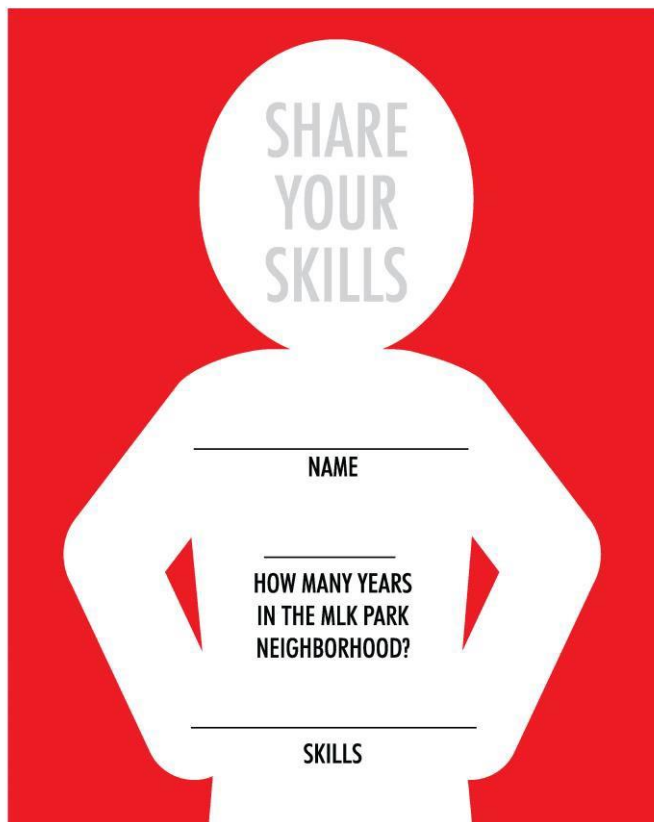


Figure: The City wanted to understand what expertise and abilities residents have in the neighborhood. Given that, all participants in attendance at the neighborhood champion convening and at the listening sessions were asked to share their talents. The silhouette used for the Asset Mapping activity required residents to list their name, how many years they have lived, worked or played in the MLK Park Neighborhood and asked participants to list their skills. On the back of the form we asked for personal contact and demographic information. We intentionally placed that form on the back so that neighbor information wasn't easily detectable by the

African-American / Black	17
American-Indian	1
Asian	2
Caucasian / White	10
No Response	4
Two or More Races	1
TOTAL RESPONSES	35

Figure: This table represents the number of collective responses from neighbors who were asked to self-identify race/ethnicity on the Asset-Map Activity.

Quality of Life Wrap-Up and Celebration

A final combined event was held to recognize participants and celebrate the work they had accomplished with their families, friends, and the community at-large. The event featured all of the community engagement tools used throughout the process and enabled attendees to weigh-in again on the future state of the MLK Park Lodge and the historical referenced *Boxing Programming* that once existed in that space. Neighbors who were part of the work group process were given an opportunity to speak to the audience about the work they had done and their final recommendations to improve quality of life in the neighborhood. During the event dinner was provided, ArtPrize hosted a kids activity for the youth and the neighbors enjoyed a cake and punch reception immediately following the presentations. All participants received a Certificate of Participation that was signed by the Mayor.

***Pictured Below:** Neighbors were given an opportunity present their recommendations to the community at-large, participate in a resource fair orchestrated by the Neighborhood Connectors and continue the conversation with fellow residents about other ways to move the needle forward in the neighborhood.*



MLK Park Neighborhood Vision Statement – The Why

Our neighborhood envisions a safe, supportive, inclusive community built on our rich history, neighborhood voice, and mutual respect.

MLK Park Neighborhood Mission Statement – The How

To advocate for and offer a wide-range of programs, opportunities, and resources that will enhance overall quality of life in the neighborhood.

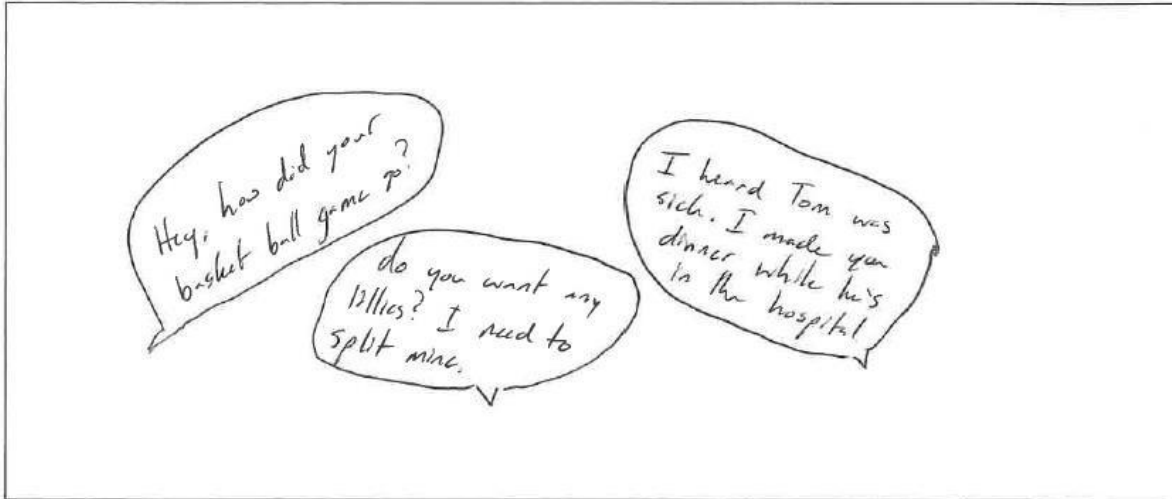
Values

We believe there are shared ideals and resources necessary for a daily life of mutual support and respect in our neighborhood. The values that guide our decisions include:

- **Diversity and Inclusion**
- **Community Health**
- **Accountability**
- **Education**
- **Safe Spaces**
- **Equity**
- **Leadership**
- **Environmental Stewardship /Sustainability**
- **Collaboration / Partnership**
- **Access**
- **Economic Opportunity**

We hope that MLK Park residents, neighbors, and community partners will embrace collaboration to become a more hospitable, family-friendly, accessible, safe, green, historic neighborhood where ALL people can live, work, and play in a supportive, inclusive community.

DRAW A PICTURE:



Background Information: During the Quality of Life Study Process, neighbors were given a chance to participate in a vision exercise where neighbors could write a statement or draw a picture that depicted their idea of the future state of the neighborhood. They were prompted with the statement: I envision the MLK Park Neighborhood to be a place where... The vision and values statements are a culmination of their collective responses. (See Appendix 2 for additional responses from neighbors).

PART 1 – Neighbors help us fill in the Blanks

A yellow graphic with a large black text invitation: "YOU'RE INVITED TO HELP US FILL IN THE BLANKS!". Above the text are three speech bubbles with prompts: "I envision my neighborhood to be a place where _____.", "_____ is what makes our neighborhood STRONG!", and "I think the MLK Park Lodge needs better _____.". Below the text are two more speech bubbles: "The MLK Park neighborhood is awesome because _____." and "What areas of the neighborhood could be improved? _____.". At the bottom is the logo for the City of Grand Rapids and the text "MLK PARK NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY OF LIFE IMPROVEMENT STUDY 2019".

Before the Quality of Life process began, the Neighborhood Connectors were working closely with members of the community to build a foundation for leadership. There were many neighbors that were involved in the formation and execution of Block Clubs before the QOL work group phase even began. This is important to note because these neighborhood champions received Neighborhood Association Start-up Training, hosted regular block club meetings and listening sessions and conducted a mock Neighborhood Association meeting with various city departments including the GRPD. This is an important distinction because during this process, neighborhood boundaries were expanded, and the scope of the work began to broaden. Residents were already beginning to understand the importance of working together and the power of collective impact, so many were ripe to push this work forward. However, the area of focus was also expanded after this first phase, requiring a process that acknowledged the work already completed, but also allowed additional residents to get 'up to speed' and involved in the process. Finally, the QOL process would provide leaders in the community with more tools to address some of the issues that exist in the neighborhood.

Figure: Image of the mailer that was sent to addresses inside the MLK Park Neighborhood boundaries.

The Quality of Life Study process has shown us that as a city that our city is growing and thriving exponentially, and our outcomes are dependent not on telling people how they need to live, but rather listening to how people want to live. Deep listening and understanding provided increased knowledge about how the people of the MLK Park Neighborhood currently experience life in the neighborhood and eliminated some assumptions and preconceived notions about what we thought was needed to improve quality of life in this community. Residents also shared their personal stories and learned from one another.

Through this process, residents were also able to create community agreements, which established expectations and rules for future meetings. This was important in order to maintain a safe and respectful environment/experience. (See Appendix 3 for a full listing of the MLK Park Neighborhood Community Agreements.)

The three listening sessions provided a great deal of valuable feedback and helped the City of Grand Rapids better understand what makes the neighborhood strong and what areas of the neighborhood could be improved. Recurring themes began to emerge from the listening sessions. Areas of key concern included:

- Fears regarding the safety of the neighborhood and conflicts with the Grand Rapids Police Department
- Housing challenges such as long-time residents receiving frequent solicitations to sell homes at less than market rate and older residents who wish to age-in-place but are not equipped to do so
- Road condition and maintenance concerns, including condition of roads, parking challenges, and snow removal
- Youth concerns, including a lack of positive activities and outlets for teenagers and youth in the neighborhood.

We also heard quite frequently that the MLK Park Lodge is in need of repairs. Due to this and the presence of the boxing ring in the middle of the space, the lodge is underutilized as a space that could be used for community programming. The Parks and Recreation Department currently does not rent out the lodge due to liability with the boxing ring being present.

Overarching these issues, many neighbors said “we need to grow our neighborhood association and work together to create a shared vision for the future-state of the neighborhood”. These topics were captured in the Mini Report provided back to residents at the Neighborhood Knowledge Exchange in March 2019. (See Appendix 4 for the MLK Park Neighborhood 2019 Mini-Report).



Pictured Above: Neighbors worked together during community meetings to create a mission and vision statement for the MLK Park Neighborhood Association. They also spent a significant amount of time working together to list out both short-term and long term goals for the organization.

In a QOL Vision Exercise one neighbor stated:
I envision the MLK Park Neighborhood to be a place where...

"Neighbors are connected. Our older population have stayed connected and are the heart of our neighborhood. The park is utilized for events, city projects and neighborhood clean-ups. Our neighborhood is changing in a monthly basis with new residents, home owners and renters. I envision a place where yards are kept up and neighbors care."

As the process continued, the complex nature of the MLK Park Neighborhood and its conflict points further emerged. For example, for some neighbors, a more gentrified neighborhood evokes feelings of fear and uncertainty. For these residents, there was an underlying notion that the City of Grand Rapids can't be trusted and this process was merely a result of a strategic effort to redevelop the area for the benefit of white residents who have recently moved into the neighborhood. Neighbors expressed concerns about potential displacement and being left out of economic opportunities for minority entrepreneurs and small businesses. By contrast, residents also reported that they appreciate the diversity in gender, race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status that exists in the neighborhood as a result of recent investment and improvements. These residents characterized the neighborhood as resource rich with many different schools, churches, community centers, and transportation options for neighbors. They value having different cultures, perspectives, and new people that widen the pool of talent that already exists in the neighborhood.

We grappled with issues and had hard conversations about the past, present, and future of the neighborhood and as a result, a reinvigorated group of resident leaders and neighborhood champions emerged.



Pictured Above: During the Neighbor Knowledge Exchange, participants were asked to engage in several dot voting activities to help the City pare down information, issues and themes that were derived from the QOL Listening Session data. Our community engagement tools asked questions like “What areas of the neighborhood could be improved?” and “What are the strengths of the MLK Park Neighborhood?” (See Appendix 5 for samples of Community Engagement Tools used during the QOL Process).

Intentionality, a strategic framework, and active listening were integral parts of this community engagement process. The data and the feedback we gathered from residents was very important, but establishing a relationship with neighbors based on humility, honesty, and trust is what gave the quality of life study the ability to take root in the neighborhood. We were able to establish a collaborative partnership created by understanding our interdependence on one another, maintaining accountability, uplifting residents and understanding the power of teamwork. This ultimately “filled in the blanks” and prepared the neighborhood to embark upon the formalization of the Neighborhood Association and creation of action plans around neighborhood building and park improvements and activation.



Pictured Above: Images from the Neighbor Knowledge Exchange so residents could review and process the data collected during the City’s community Engagement process.

DISAGGREGATED DATA AND RESIDENT VOICE

During the engagement process the City was able to obtain more data from participants about how neighbors experience quality of life in the neighborhood. One of the methods used was the dissemination of a Mini-SWOT Analysis document where attendees were asked to fill in the blank word bubbles. The document contained a SWOT Analysis Key to help neighbors understand how they should identify what may be a strength, weakness, opportunity, or threat that exists in the neighborhood. The form was distributed during both listening sessions and also included a space where a person could mark whether they live, work, or play in the neighborhood. This was an important distinction because while the process was inclusive and we heard from a wide variety of stakeholders, the primary intent of the study has been to lift up resident voice and build leadership capacity in the MLK Park neighborhood. In the City's efforts to support resident-led changes that will give renewed vitality to the community, it was important to disaggregate and honor the voices of those that live in the designated area.

MLK PARK NEIGHBORHOOD MINI-SWOT ANALYSIS

Please mark the phrase that best describes you:

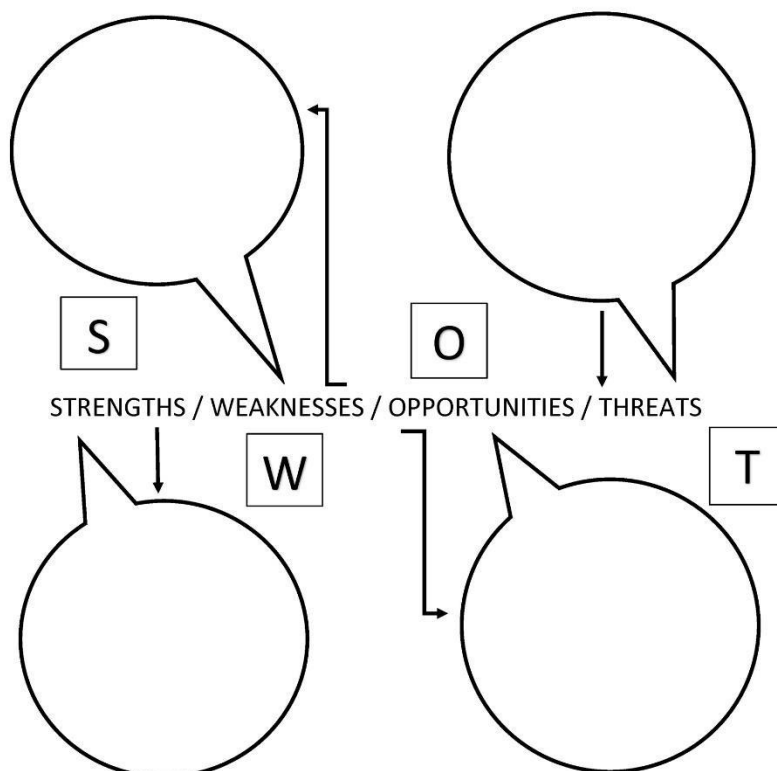
☐ I LIVE in the MLK Park Neighborhood.

☐ I WORK OR PLAY in the MLK Park Neighborhood.



Lipscomb, Latesha | CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS

HELLO NEIGHBOR!
PLEASE FILL IN THE BLANK WORD BUBBLES.



SWOT ANALYSIS KEY: Strengths – Positives, bonuses or evoking a sense of pride about your neighborhood. Weaknesses – Problems, issues or challenges in the neighborhood. Opportunities – Support, collaboration and wins in the neighborhood. Threats – Challenges, barriers and problems working against the advancement of the neighborhood.

Figure: The Mini- SWOT Analysis was completed by participants and give them an opportunity to identify positives, challenges, opportunities for support or collaboration and barriers working against the advancement of the neighborhood. The goal is to get neighbors thinking critically about ways we can shift weakness into strengths and how what threatens a neighborhood may be opportunity to support one another in creating shared wins for the neighborhood.

As a next step, the City took all of the feedback from neighbors and began to delve into the process of disaggregating the data. We created Venn Diagrams to clearly delineate resident voice from non-resident voice. The figures below are intended to highlight resident feedback and show non-resident alignment.

Figure: Mini-SWOT Analysis Venn Diagrams 1 and 2



STRENGTHS – Residents often identified the MLK Park neighborhood as welcoming and neighborly. We heard residents describe residents as “friendly neighbors that have a passion for the neighborhood, and all its people” as well as “people who care”. There is a great sense of pride in how residents treat one another and the community in which they live. Whereas non-residents provided feedback where they identified the quality homes and its historical character as attributes that make the neighborhood strong. Residents and non-residents alike appreciate the location, diversity, and multi-use, large park in the neighborhood. It was also expressed frequently that the “consistency in engagement with the community” from the City is much appreciated and doesn’t go unrecognized.

WEAKNESSES – It was clear from the SWOT analysis that people who live in the area experience the neighborhood differently than those that are stakeholders and non-residents. Residents were more concerned with the lack of activation in their under-utilized park, neighborhood maintenance, deteriorating curb appeal, and lack luster amenities. These are all points that speak to quality of life differently than non-residents who seemed to focus more on drugs, crime, cleanliness, safety, and people from outside the neighborhood coming into the community behaving poorly. However, residents do believe that the neighborhood has a bad reputation that is no longer applicable and shared some common concerns over crime in the area.

There were also a few other communal points raised during the listening sessions where we saw alignment in thought around issues like over-policing, old infrastructure, and the absence of a formal neighborhood association. Residents pointed out “problem blocks with high police response and cited seeing “swarms of cop cars” regularly as weaknesses that exist in the neighborhood. Many non-residents agreed that crime and disrespect are contributing factors to the continual and omnipresence of the police in the MLK Park

neighborhood. Residents and non-residents were also in agreement that the area needs infrastructural upgrades like installing adequate lighting and new park signage. Finally there was great synergy around the immediate need for a formalized neighborhood association.

OPPORTUNITIES – The biggest commonalities we heard in the opportunity space were the opportunities to employ and empower the youth, create a community center for neighbors, and the prospect of redirecting economic investment and business development into the neighborhood. This section of the analysis enabled neighbors to dream together about the future state of the neighborhood. All three of the aforementioned opportunities create wins for the neighborhood which seem to be priorities for both residents and non-residents.

THREATS – The threats word bubble is the area of the Mini-SWOT Analysis is where we saw the most commonalities. The biggest collective worry among all neighbors was Gentrification. The MLK Park neighborhood is changing so quickly that people worry about over-development and displacement which would ultimately change the historical character of the neighborhood. For many people of color that are also long-term residents, there is a sense that “legacy families are being pushed out” of the neighborhood. Whether having to relocate is a result of the inability to pay property taxes, not being financially able to bring older homes up to code, or just rising housing costs overall, neighbors are fearful of losing their homes. As we grappled with the notion of Gentrification, some neighbors were able to identify some benefits of this type of cultural, community shift but for the most part gentrification continues to be a frightening concept for many residents.

Another area of concern that came of quite frequently dealt with crime, drugs, gang activity, and trash in the neighborhood. Neighbors were in agreement that all of these things combined are working against the advancement of the neighborhood.



Pictured Above: A long-term resident sharing a positive story about her experience in the neighborhood during the Quality of Life community celebration.



**WE are the change
we've been waiting for!**



In a QOL Vision Exercise one neighbor stated: I envision the MLK Park Neighborhood to be a place where... "We can greet everyone we see; connect, help and feel safe as a diverse neighborhood".

PARK IMPROVEMENTS & ACTIVATION

The City of Grand Rapids Parks Department in conjunction with the Neighborhood Association, resident volunteers and other community stakeholders implement a series of immediate park maintenance programs like pulling weeds, tree trimming, painting Pergola's at the pool and laying down mulch in flower beds to help beautify the park and build relationships between neighbors.

Provide clear communication of park requirements and expectations to create and maintain a safe and secure park. Install park rules and usage signage in MLK Park that displays park hours, city ordinances and other pertinent park use information.

Ensure community involvement in all phases of the feasibility study of the MLK Park Lodge and proactively seek the inclusion of minority contractors and artisans to diversify the pool of applicants.

Demonstrate the commitment to improved quality of life in the neighborhood through a concerted and substantial investment in MLK Park by the City of Grand Rapids and other stakeholders.

Renovate the MLK Park Lodge to create a modernized, aesthetically pleasing community venue and rental facility that is safe and affordable for public use.

Activate MLK Park by creating new events-based activities that will create active, regular uses on a monthly basis, including the winter season.

Implement new street parking rules and regulations in the neighborhood to ease parking in the neighborhood for residents.

NEIGHBORHOOD BUILDING

The Neighborhood Association finalizes its name, creates a logo and develops a communication plan that outlines goals and objectives for messaging, community awareness and expanded outreach. MLK Neighborhood Association will launch a website for neighbors to access information related to meetings, upcoming events, and methods of contacting the association.

Objective: Connect with every household in the area so that at least 75% of neighbors will know about the newly revitalized neighborhood association.

Create an annual calendar of outreach and resident engagement for the MLK Park Neighborhood. This annual list should also include activation events implemented by the MLK Park Neighborhood Association and other community partners.

Build positive relationships with the police in the neighborhood based on comradery and trust, including utilization of MLK Park for events and activities that will facilitate relationship building with neighbors and community stakeholders.

Provide comprehensive resources for long-term people of color and all neighbors to age in place

Create a summer youth employment program where teenagers in our neighborhood can work with local landscapers, the Parks department and other professionals to increase beautification through collaborative action.

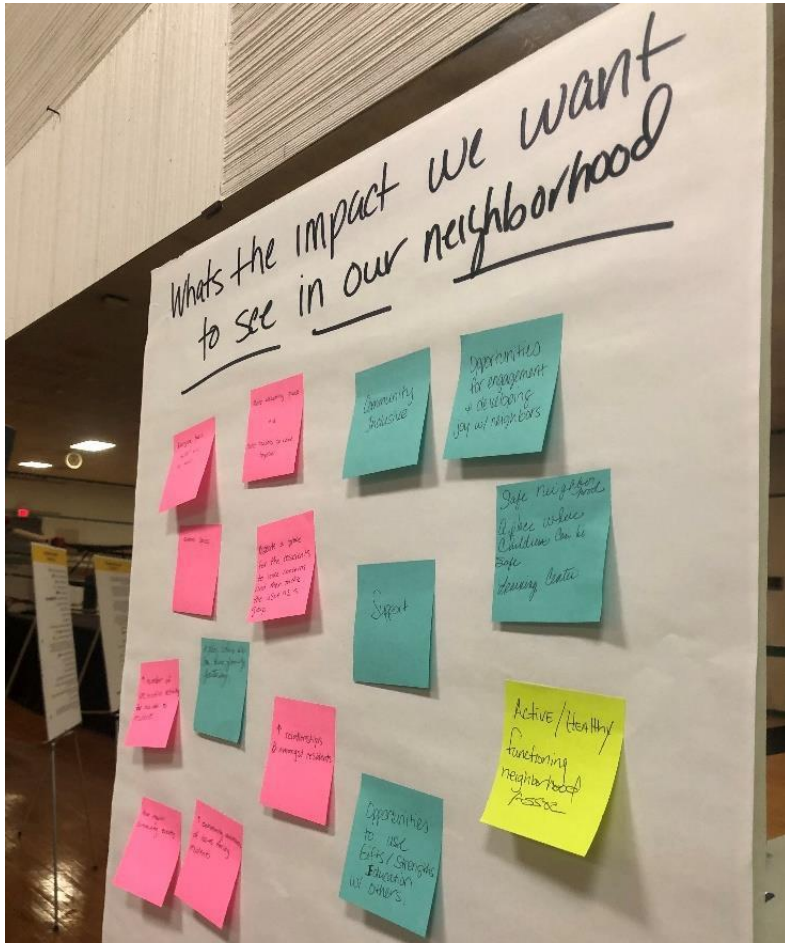


MLK PARK

NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY OF LIFE
IMPROVEMENT STUDY 2019

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS & TAKEAWAYS

PART 2 - PROJECT REIMAGINE: THE FUTURE STATE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD



Pictured Above: Residents were asked to provide feedback during the community engagement process on what impact they wanted to see in their neighborhood. We were careful to display responses throughout the Quality of Life Process.

Change is afoot in the neighborhood and residents have been working together to organize and engage neighbors. On the surface it may seem that very little is being done to address issues like racism, drug activity, gun violence, tensions with police, and long-term residents of color being pressured to sell their homes, but things are in fact changing. This is a result of residents, neighbors, and stakeholders working together to make regular, positive contributions to the process.

The future state of the MLK Park Neighborhood is a place where any one can live, learn, work, or belong. It is a neighborhood where residents have a consistent voice and advocate successfully for themselves. It is a strong community with many opportunities to gather and fellowship in a clean, safe, and secure environment.

The Quality of Life Study pursued two focus areas, with the intent to move the neighborhood towards this vision. The first, Park Improvements and Activation, worked to identify and prioritize park improvements that are necessary to provide a clean, safe, and welcoming public space for all neighbors to enjoy. The Parks Yes! Mileage passed in 2013 which provided \$950,000.00 in investment needed to address safety concerns and infrastructural upgrades in the park. In the past, the Parks & Recreation Department reached out to the community to obtain feedback on what neighbors desired most in terms of improvements. As a result of

that feedback, the Park will receive additional lighting, a new picnic shelter with accessible picnic tables, and playground improvements in the coming months. There is additional funding available to make updates and changes to the MLK Park Lodge. The Quality of Life Study was used as an opportunity to engage the community around these improvements, as well as the future use of the lodge. With the discontinuation of the private boxing program that was once housed in the space, a new vision emerged for an improved facility that can function as a multi-use, with the ability to rent as a potential option. The work group also wanted to determine how to positively activate residents and neighbors in the park as partners.

While this is definitely a sign of progress, during the Quality of Life process we learned that there is desire for additional park improvements that residents view as a high priority, including the removal or replacement of unstable trees. The study also identified longer-term recommendations to improve the park, including installation of a second pavilion and playground, installing technology hardware for internet accessibility, the addition of outdoor exercise equipment, and creating an irrigation plan for the grass, shrubs,

and flowers in the park. (See Appendix 6 for images related to aforementioned recommended Park Improvements.)

Neighbors see MLK Park and the MLK Park Lodge playing a vital role in bringing all people together. They are committed to providing continued support for community engagement, including creation of an ad hoc committee with the Park Improvements & Activation neighborhood champions to work directly with the Parks Department, to monitor developments in the neighborhood at large and park improvements in the neighborhood, and ensure diverse representation from the neighborhood.

The second major focus of the Study, and a critical element to achieving the desired future state for MLK Park, is Neighborhood Building. Specifically, residents are working towards the MLK Park Neighborhood Association becoming a formal structure that promotes civic engagement, builds human capacity, and serves as a conduit for the facilitation of some QOL final recommendations.

They are also committed to ensuring that there is diverse representation from various stakeholders in the neighborhood that represent a myriad of lived experiences. Specifically, it is important to maintain uninterrupted and intentional engagement of people of color, including additional work to reach Latinx residents in the neighborhood.



Pictured Above: Residents from all over the neighborhood brought their perspective to the Quality of Life bi-weekly to ensure that their voices were consistently being heard, acknowledged and elevated throughout the engagement process.

Residents envision that in the future, the Neighborhood Association and the Neighborhood Watch program will be revived and people will better look out for one another. Teenagers and youth will have something to do and older adults will get regular wellness checks from neighbors. There are less vacant spaces, more minority owned businesses, better parking options available and a newly renovated lodge that can be used by community groups and families in the neighborhood. It is a community where all people can thrive and not just survive.

The work groups have created many sound recommendations that will require additional City staffing support, facilitation, additional funding, and collaboration for implementation. The formation of new partnerships, maintaining flexibility and economic investment play a vital role in the way the neighborhood evolves and increases quality of life.

02

QUALITY OF LIFE FOCUS AREAS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Neighborhood Building Work Group



Problem Statement

One of the most critical issues that affect the MLK Park Neighborhood is the absence of a fully functioning Neighborhood Association. The geographic area to be served by the newly formed MLK Park Neighborhood Association was once the northern part of the service area of the now defunct South East End Neighborhood Association (SEENA). Adjacent organizations and informal groups have stepped in periodically to serve portions of the area, however, there has not been formal association representation or a consolidated neighborhood identity since SEENA ceased to operate officially more than a decade ago. Without a neighborhood association to represent them, residents often find that neighbor interests rarely align with work that may be taking place and engaged residents may burn out quickly. This has resulted in many neighbors feeling disregarded and overwhelmed addressing neighborhood and other systemic issues.

One of the primary purposes of the Quality of Life Study was to help develop a shared vision for the neighborhood of the advancement of mutual resident interests. During the Quality of Life listening sessions, we heard many neighbors express an interest in reviving the Neighborhood Association and their Neighborhood Watch status. As a result, additional organizing, support and facilitation was needed for neighbors during the engagement process to properly prepare them to work within the framework of a traditional neighborhood association.

In addition to the organizational aspects, the Study also facilitated important conversations to help the neighborhood reevaluate their identity and goals. The neighborhood has seen many new neighbors coming in and seemingly more residents of color moving out. This creates a problem for ensuring that there is adequate input from a cross-section of neighbors that matches the diversity of the neighborhood.

The lack of a neighborhood association has also contributed to residents being disconnected from community resources, such as employment and workforce training and development programs. Reestablishment of the association could repair this broken path of communication and establish a resource structure for problem solving within the neighborhood. Residents also view the role of the association as a group of advocates or champions that neighbors with quieter voices can rely on to help them navigate through complex system issues. They also expressed an interest in working together through the Association as accountability partners for cleanliness, safety, and responsible development in the neighborhood.

Engagement

The Neighborhood Building work group was facilitated by Matthew Downey and Ciara Adkins. Matthew Downey is a passionate and skilled consultant with years of experience working with the GVSU Johnson Center for Philanthropy, various neighborhoods, agencies, and local non-profits. Ciara Atkins is a licensed attorney who grew up in the MLK neighborhood and specializes in Business Entity Formation & Intellectual Property Law. Because revitalization of the neighborhood association is so important for the advancement of the neighborhood, the City of Grand Rapids retained the services of these skilled consultants to assist residents in creating a formal neighborhood association. Equally important to the professional services provided, was the ability of these consultants to connect to residents based on shared experiences, empathy, and understanding. These relationships make engagement far more effective and break down barriers for establishing community trust.

This work group was comprised of mostly MLK Park neighborhood residents, including two Neighborhood Building Co-chairs. They were further supported by City staff, the two consultants, and additional input from other community stakeholders.

Goals & Opportunities

This work group's primary goal was to begin understanding neighborhood organization and working toward becoming a formal 501(c) 3 organization. As a result, some of their initial goals centered around creating more opportunities for fellowship, promoting civic engagement, building human capacity, and understanding the roles and responsibilities of a neighborhood association. The work group began listing priorities for the upcoming year, laying the foundation for potential resident-led events, and generating a detailed list of ideas for year-round activation and programming. The group also identified more immediate opportunities for collaboration, like ArtPrize: Project 1, which will bring additional focus to the neighborhood.

Through Phase 1 of the work in the neighborhood, a foundation had been laid by several members of the pre-existing block clubs. The outreach efforts and engagement under the Quality of Life Study brought about a spike in participation, bringing additional resident voices to the table. We were inspired to see their desire to not only participate throughout the Quality of Life process, but their interest to take on additional, longer-term roles in the community. As opportunities arose to serve in other capacities, like participating in the City's Neighborhood Leadership Academy and serving on the Parks & Recreation Feasibility Study Steering Committee, neighbors welcomed these platforms for continued participation.

The MLK Park Neighborhood Association was formally endorsed by the State of Michigan in June of 2019. The Neighborhood Association will begin meeting formally in the fall of this year. Some of the main objectives for their initial meetings will include board training, determining their official name, logo design, branding/messaging, and the formation of a neighborhood engagement committee. This work group will also discuss and finalize quality of life strategy and implementation through fiscal year 2021.

The MLK Park Lodge was the previous home of the association. It is important to note that the group decided to keep the MLK Park Lodge as their location to house the Neighborhood Association and to host its monthly meetings in the future. In order to expand outreach to even more people in the neighborhood, it is important that the association is visible and centrally located.

Several members of this work group will continue to meet during Phase 3 of this process, and will continue to seek input from other neighbors around the structural design and implementation of the new neighborhood association. Both Matthew Downey and Ciarra Adkins will also continue to provide professional guidance in the formation process.

Recommendations

Final recommendations provided by the Neighborhood Building Work Group are as follows:

- Finalize the Neighborhood Association name, create a logo, and develop a communication plan that outlines goals and objectives for messaging, community awareness, and expanded outreach.
- Connect with every household in the area with the goal that at least 75% of neighbors will know about the newly formed neighborhood association.
- Create an annual calendar of outreach and resident engagement for the MLK Park Neighborhood. This annual list should also include activation events implemented by the MLK Park Neighborhood Association and other community partners.
- Build positive relationships with the police in the neighborhood based on comradery and trust, including utilization of MLK Park for events and activities that will facilitate relationship building with neighbors and community stakeholders.
- Provide comprehensive resources for long-term residents of color and all neighbors to age in place.
- Implement new street parking rules and regulations in the neighborhood to ease parking challenges in the neighborhood for residents.
- Create a summer youth employment program where teenagers in the neighborhood can work with local landscapers, the Parks department, and other professionals to increase beautification and youth civic engagement through collaborative action.

See Appendix 7 for full Recommendation Matrix.

Accomplishments

The Neighborhood Building work group accomplished many things during the Quality of Life Study to lay the foundation for the association, one of the largest tasks being the creation of a Mission and Vision statement for their organization. We spent a lot of time tackling the “how” and the “why” and eventually the group created two statements that equaled one voice. These statements serve as an important acclamation of the neighborhood, along with the creation of bylaws and the identification of incorporators from the neighborhood, in order to guide the work moving forward.

Vision Statement - The Why

Our neighborhood envisions a safe, supportive, inclusive community built on our rich history, neighborhood voice and mutual respect.

Mission Statement - The How

To advocate for and offer a wide-range of programs, opportunities, and resources that will enhance overall quality of life in the neighborhood.



Now that the Articles of Incorporation have been filed and the Neighborhood Association has been formally endorsed by the State of Michigan, some of the next steps include filing for a DBA Status (Doing Business As), requesting an Employee Identification Number (EIN) and beginning to work on the 1023ez application.

Park Improvements & Activation Work Group



MLK Park History Facts from Friends of Grand Rapids Parks: The Parks Commission purchased the land for Franklin Park in 1911. A swimming pool and lodge were added in 1919, and tennis courts were removed in 1956 to make way for a playground. Franklin Park was renamed as a memorial to Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in June, 1969.

Problem Statement

When we asked residents “What areas of the neighborhood could be improved?” we repeatedly heard that there are several areas of MLK Park and the MLK Park Lodge that are in dire need of repairs, improvements, or changes. Going into the process, the City’s Park and Recreation Department was aware of several issues, and wished to use the Quality of Life Process as a way to further engage residents and determine their priorities for improvement.

Currently there are several issues that make using the park as a gathering space, for any reason, less than ideal. Neighbors spoke of issues like the inability to water the grass in the park, the need for increased lighting, the absence of adequate pavilions, the need for increased signage in the park regarding City ordinances, and the addition of pet waste stations, just to name a few.

We learned that the residents in the neighborhood would really like to use the Park Lodge as a multi-purpose space for classes, special events, family gatherings, and community meetings. However, the Park Lodge is not in a condition that encourages its use. The Lodge doesn’t have natural light, compounded by the fact that the large windows are completely boarded up, blocking sunlight and views into and out of the space. In addition, there is a large unused boxing ring in the middle of the space, which significantly limits the types of activities that can take place. The ring is not owned by the City and is a remnant of an expired use agreement. There is little to no active programming. Neighbors are not interested in using the lodge in its current state and the Parks Department is not willing to rent out the facility in its current state due to the liability of the old boxing equipment that is still housed in the park lodge.

Some of the key considerations for renovations should include heating and cooling, increased lighting, lead and other hazard remediation, ADA compliance, and CPTED principles. Although MLK Park has one of the few pools in the city, the locker rooms are in disrepair and the dimly lit, musty environment is not inviting or up-to-date, and may be considered unsafe for neighbors.

The neighborhood recognizes that there has been a lack of activation and programming in the park because of these same issues. Because there is an inadequate amount of activation and community engagement at MLK Park, it has become a gathering space for people from outside the neighborhood to engage in criminal activity, which in turn brings more police to the park on a regular basis. As a result, many neighbors said they don't feel safe frequenting the park and they are unable to enjoy the park for its intended use. The park doesn't offer much safety and security for residents due to the inadequate lighting, lack of signage to properly inform all people of park rules, and the continual presence of the Grand Rapids Police Department, which neighbors perceive as over-policing, racial profiling, and harassment without just cause. Unfortunately this problem-cycle also contributes to the negative stigma and community perception associated with the neighborhood.

Given the aforementioned reasons, the work group is recommending that the City of Grand Rapids and other stakeholders demonstrate a commitment to equity and improved quality of life in the neighborhood through concerted and continued investment in MLK Park.

Engagement

In 2017, the Parks & Recreation Department conducted community engagement around how neighbors would like to see millage funding used at MLK Park. There were 3 meetings hosted and based on the feedback received, nearly \$950,000 in investment work was completed. This work focused on needed safety and asset management improvements, such as boiler replacement, roof repairs, drinking fountain replacement, increased lighting and more. Additional amenities will also be added, including new playground equipment, pathway lighting, and additional ADA-accessible picnic tables and pavilions. (See Appendix 8 for a full list of Capital Investments and a general timeline).



Pictured Above: The Park Improvements & Activation Work Group with City Staff person Karie Enriquez discussing pending improvements to the Park and the MLK Park Lodge.

There is some millage funding leftover from these initial improvements and the Parks & Recreation department was very interested in going back to the residents of the MLK Park neighborhood to determine how the remaining funds should be used. We had heard in the past that neighbors wanted to see the Park Lodge renovated, that they desired to see some improvements made in the park, and that there was a need for improved lighting near the parking lot. The Quality of Life process was the City's opportunity to go back into the community to obtain confirmation that these items were still priorities and to learn about new potential improvements the neighbors wanted and needed.

The Park Improvements & Activation work group focused on curating an up-to-date list of desired park improvements, coupled with ways to build and support community engagement in the neighborhood. The group identified problems in the park that need attention, as well as larger issues surrounding activation of the park as a public space. More than 8 people participated in this work group including representatives from nearby neighborhoods, residents, and representation from multiple departments of the City of Grand Rapids.

Conversations regarding MLK Park began with discussion about areas for improvement, intentional use of the park, and how to reduce barriers to use the park more effectively. It was important to the work group that the City understood some of the priorities for residents which included renovation of the Lodge, lighting, signage, and updating the pool locker room. The group also discussed the potential for long-term build-out of the Lodge to provide for additional uses for the Park Lodge space in the future. Other issues that were points of conversation during this engagement included: the lack of street maintenance, mobility and parking issues, tree & lawn care, shade in the park, the need for more trash cans and pet waste stations, ADA compliance, public restrooms, and overall beautification of the park.

The work group also wanted to make sure that their ideas honored and were inclusive of all neighbors, so they were very intentional to make recommendations like "lifeguards for the park pool need to reflect the community it serves". This was also the tone of the group during discussions about ways to cultivate safe spaces for minority residents and youth to "hang out", recognizing the social value of gathering at MLK Park but separating that from the negative stigma of presumed criminal activity happening in the same space. During our engagements, residents stated repeatedly that GRPD can often be found lingering in the parking lot. They feel that police are harassing residents of color who may be leisurely enjoying the park space as it was intended. The presence of multiple police cars in the park on a regular basis make neighbors feel uncomfortable and inadvertently perpetuate the notion that the park is unsafe.

In addition to the engagement about improvements, the work group also contemplated ways to reclaim and activate the park space in more positive ways. The City asked neighbors about ways they would like to use the park and the Park Lodge in the future. The group generated a number of good ideas like hosting karate classes, senior aerobics, knitting neighbors, first-aid trainings, park parties, food truck festivals, yoga, folk school programs, and a potential space for after-school programming for youth in the neighborhood. In its current state, neighbors agree that MLK Park is under-utilized but with the right programming, funding, renovations, and continued support, MLK Park could reach its full potential and become a clean, safe, welcoming park for all.

Recommendations

Final recommendations provided by the Park Improvements & Activation Work Group are as follows:

- The City of Grand Rapids Parks Department in conjunction with the Neighborhood Association, resident volunteers and other community stakeholders implement a series of immediate park maintenance programs like pulling weeds, tree trimming, painting pergolas at the pool and laying down mulch in flower beds to help beautify the park and build relationships between neighbors.
- Provide clear communication of park requirements and expectations to create and maintain a safe and secure park. Install signage outlining park rules and usage in MLK Park that displays park hours, City ordinances, and other pertinent park use information.
- Ensure community involvement in all phases of the feasibility study of the MLK Park Lodge and proactively seek the inclusion of minority contractors and artisans.
- Activate MLK Park by creating new events-based activities that will create active, regular uses on a monthly basis, including the winter season.
- Renovate the MLK Park Lodge to create a modernized, aesthetically pleasing community venue and rental facility that is safe and affordable for public use.
- Demonstrate the commitment to improved quality of life in the neighborhood through a concerted and substantial investment in MLK Park by the City of Grand Rapids and other stakeholders.

See Appendix 9 for full Recommendation Matrix.

Accomplishments

Since the inception of this work group, residents have taken ownership of the process, partnerships have been formed, more resident leaders have accepted the call to action, and there is programming coming into the neighborhood that will increase activation in the park. One success is the creation of a vibrant MLK Park Lodge Feasibility Study Committee which is comprised mostly of residents who served on the work groups. To date, the City has more than 10 people that have expressed an interest in working collaboratively to ensure community involvement in all phases of the study. This new group will help make sure the City is actively seeking the inclusion of minority contractors and artisans to diversify the pool of applicants and will play a vital role in the selection of the architectural firm who will look at options for long-term buildout of the lodge. A RFP for bids will be released to the general public to conduct this Feasibility Study which will provide important data on the condition of the existing building and provide design concepts for future improvements. The Parks & Recreation MLK Feasibility Study Committee will begin meeting this fall 2019 in the neighborhood.

There were a number of conversations around the need for clear communication of park rules and requirements to create and maintain a safe and secure park, especially as more dog owners seem to be moving into the neighborhood. In direct response to the final recommendations from this work group, the City is installing signage that displays park rules and pet waste stations that remind residents to pick up pet waste and keep their dogs on a leash.

Progress was also made in terms of creating and leveraging new partnerships with community stakeholders. For example, Project 1 by ArtPrize is working in collaboration with MLK neighbors for an exhibition where MLK Park will be one of the host sites which will bring a lot of visibility and economic opportunity to the neighborhood. The ArtPrize Project 1 website states: "This fall, people from all over the world will be able to step into this neighborhood to explore spectacular art installations, sculptures, public events, performances, urban interventions and community-oriented projects – and consider what it means to belong".

Here is an excerpt from the artprize.org website that further explains the partnership:

Martin Luther King Jr. Park

Located in a residential neighborhood on the southeast side of the city, MLK Park will feature works by artists Amanda Browder and Heather Hart. Browder will wrap the exterior of the community lodge in the center of the park with a vibrant, multi-colored textile piece — created with the help of local donations and volunteers. Hart will install a sculpture in the park that mimics the roof of a house that appears to sink into the lawn. Visitors will be able to climb on the roof and enter the attic, and the roof will serve as a stage for local music, dance and spoken word. We chose MLK Park as a Project 1 site in collaboration with community members, city officials and the artists.



Pictured Above: Rendering of Kaleidoscopic by artist Amanda Browder over the MLK Park Lodge.

This work group has cultivated and empowered many outstanding resident and neighbor leaders that have made significant contributions to the Quality of Life Study overall and Project 1 by ArtPrize. The transformational leadership that has transpired in both work groups from building resident voice and empowering people that are typically excluded from the planning process is an accomplishment that should not go unrecognized.

RECURRING NEIGHBORHOOD THEMES AND CHALLENGES

Throughout the Quality of Life process, there were several themes that we heard repeatedly. The final report is intended for a broad audience of all people interested in the well-being of the people of MLK Park and who have a stake in the critical decisions that affect the quality of life for those in the neighborhood. This section, in particular, is expected to be of interest to residents, neighbors, agency providers, non-profits, elected leadership, city staff, funders, stakeholders, and community members that are interested in being a part of the overall effort to improve quality of life. Listed below are some key points to consider on various recurring themes that affect quality of life in the neighborhood. The information listed below is intended to focus conversation and aid decision makers. In addition, tracking the progress toward preferred outcomes is important to measure success, ensure accountability, and encourage program sustainability.

1. **Boxing Ring Discussion** – The official lease agreement for the boxing program at MLK Park Lodge ended a few years ago, but the Lodge still houses a standard size boxing ring, owned by a private party. Through the Quality of Life Study process, many neighbors expressed an interest in permanently removing the boxing ring from the Park Lodge. Neighbors have expressed great interest in renovating the lodge to create a modernized, aesthetically pleasing community venue and rental facility that is safe and affordable for public use. We engaged the community at several different points to gauge interest in the resurrection of boxing programming and engaged residents and neighbors in discussions about the future state of the MLK

Park Lodge. For the most part, neighbors said that they would like to do away with boxing programming and the boxing ring completely, but honor the legacy of boxing in the neighborhood through some sort of plaque, sculpture, mural, or artistic component. As an added measure, we offered a dot voting exercise at the end of the Quality of Life process so more people could vote on whether or not they agree that the boxing ring should be removed so the lodge can be used as a multi-purpose, rentable space. Based on that dot voting activity, 30 voted that they strongly agree that the boxing ring should be removed, 3 people agreed, 6 people were neutral, 0 people disagreed, and 10 people strongly disagreed. As this work moves forward, it will be critical to obtain more documented community buy-in as residents, the City, and other stakeholders make decisions related to boxing programming at the MLK Park Lodge. The prevailing school of thought from the Quality of Life process is that the MLK Park Lodge is not being used as intended and residents want to activate that space for use by families from the neighborhood.

2. **Youth Engagement** – Residents stated throughout the process that youth in the community desperately need something to do. The neighbors of MLK value people of all ages and worked diligently to come up with ways to bridge the gap between the younger and older generation. Neighbors recognize the importance of youth engagement and self-identified an opportunity during the Quality of Life process to create a shared succession plan that builds legacy and preserves generational roots in the neighborhood. The City also heard quite frequently that a center, space, and/or programming dedicated specifically to the community's youth is a priority. One of the final recommendations from Neighborhood Building work group involves creating a summer youth employment program where teenagers in the neighborhood can work with local landscapers, the Parks and Recreation Department, and other professionals to increase beautification in the neighborhood and civic engagement by youth through collaborative action. Residents strongly believe that the more investment sown into the community's children, the more benefits they will reap down the road by empowering the next generation.
3. **Community Mistrust** – A constant theme we heard is that over-policing, police abuse of power, racial profiling, and harassment is rampant in this neighborhood. Residents identified community mistrust as a weakness that has caused some residents of color to become disengaged and uninterested in finding ways to mend or build relationships with GRPD and other City departments. There is a lack of presence from Community Police Officers in the neighborhood and while some residents would like to see more officers on patrol, they recognize the need to build new positive relationships with the police in the neighborhood based on comradery and trust. To this end, the MLK Neighborhood Association would like to study national collaboration methods and research ways other urban areas have increased trust in their local police department. They would also facilitate neighborhood relationship building activities at MLK Park that activate the park, encourage collaborative activities with the police, and serve the needs of the community. Some of the potential activations that were brought up included a Coffee with a Cop series and a Neighbors Night Out event hosted in conjunction with GRPD.



4. **Renovation of the Lodge as a Rentable Space** – As previously discussed, many of the residents in the MLK Park Neighborhood would like to see the Park Lodge renovated into a modernized aesthetically pleasing community venue and rental facility that is safe and affordable for public use. Two points should be noted however as this work continues. First, there are some neighbors who fear that if the lodge becomes a space that can be rented by the general public, that will limit or cancel out availability for rentals by residents. The Neighborhood Association and its board members, in conjunction with the Parks & Recreation department, will need to work through how the space will be rented, who will house a calendar of lodge rentals and whether or not there are some days that are potentially blocked off for neighborhood or City use only.

The second issue that came up dealt with standard fees for use of the space. Some neighbors expressed concerns about the general standard for rental charges which are \$45 per hour, 2 hour minimum for indoor facilities in parks year round. Given that, members of the work group expressed interest in having a scholarship fund available for residents or potentially using the same price point as the outdoor facility costs which is \$65 for 4 hours and \$10 for each additional hour thereafter. While

neighbors were very excited about the potential opportunities to use the renovated lodge space for baby showers, family reunions, receptions, quinceañeras, and other special events, it will be important to make sure residents are involved in the decision-making process when access and affordability are being determined.

5. **Community Center Concept** – During Quality of Life, several neighbors inquired about the possibility of converting the Park Lodge into a community center. This is an idea for activation of this space that has been perpetuated in the community for quite some time now. Given that, it will be imperative to glean from residents whether or not they view a community center and a rentable multi-purpose space as one in the same. During our community celebration to close out the Quality of Life process, the City offered a feedback board about the future state of the lodge and it asked “What types of uses would you like to see take place in this space in the future?” Many of the responses we received used phrases like community center, multi-purpose space, and event center. (See Appendix 10 for the Future State of the MLK Park Lodge Results).
6. **Predatory Solicitation** – The MLK Park neighborhood is home to many African American residents who are property owners. We heard repeatedly that many of these long-term residents of color are being pressured to sell or forced out of their homes because they are unable to afford the improvements or renovations that may be required to age in place. There are a number of different entities that use predatory tactics like cold calls, door knocking, roadside signage, and leaving notices on doors where certain residents live. These messages usually convey that the buyer will purchase their property in any condition or situation for cash. One neighbor brought in a letter that had been mailed to her home from a development company in Ada which read “Our goal is to be an honest and fair company and to improve the neighborhoods that we love throughout West Michigan”. This type of correspondence makes residents feel targeted and uneasy. The MLK Park Neighborhood Advisory committee has stated the need to continue to engage in fact gathering and contemplate ways the City can educate and support long-term residents of color that are consistently being engaged by predatory solicitors. (See Appendix 11 for a sample solicitation letter received by a MLK Park Neighborhood Resident.)



7. **Alexander School** – Another point of contention that came up frequently during the process is the status and future state of Alexander School. Residents feel that the school has not been properly maintained and is an eyesore in the neighborhood. The space has been vacant for quite some time and there is lots of confusion in the neighborhood about ownership and projections for use of the space moving forward. This uncertainty around Alexander School gives rise to fear of more gentrification for some residents. During the Quality of Life process the City was not able to properly acknowledge those concerns because that property is not owned by the City of Grand Rapids, but rather by Grand Rapids Public Schools. The future state of Alexander school is a recurring theme the City should expect to receive more inquiries about as residents and neighbors mobilize to improve quality of life for themselves.

03

LESSONS LEARNED, FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

TRANSFORMING ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERING RESIDENTS

Collective Impact and the MLK Park Community Tool Box

Our process was detailed and strategic because the overall goal of the work groups was to consider the issues, contemplate viable solutions together and recommend ways stakeholders can implement change. Additional desired outcomes from the MLK Park Neighborhood Quality of Life Study included the further development of resident voice and capacity building, activation of the neighborhood and community-based solutions that residents could recognize as their own. The work groups under the QOL umbrella were a great pathway for the City of Grand Rapids to walk alongside neighbors and help them to focus and develop actionable steps to improve quality of life for all.



By using all of the aforementioned community engagement tools, we were able to assist the residents in creating key final recommendations and provide a platform for more residents to become neighborhood leaders. And in a community where the neighbors describe a strength in the neighborhood as an “abundance of talented and creative people”, this process was long overdue and welcomed by many who just need an opportunity to serve. These neighbors have a passion, dedication, and enthusiasm that will serve the neighborhood for years to come. It is true, bad things will happen, but how we respond to them defines character and quality of life.

Grand Rapids City Manager, Mark Washington, has said, “it’s not fair for some neighborhoods to have dreams and others neighborhoods to have nightmares”. As the City of Grand Rapids works diligently to become a city that demonstrates the way we value equity, it is imperative that we continue to put people first through authentic, inclusionary community engagement. When you give all people a vested interest in sparking positive change in their community, it inevitably leads to an increased sense of teamwork, support, accountability and greater collective impact.

This study is also an appeal to the City and other community stakeholders to take the neighborhood’s vision and using it to focus on implementation. This work has undoubtedly been complex in nature, involving and affecting many vested stakeholders with diverse backgrounds and sometimes competing interests, to create a shared vision for the advancement of the neighborhood. However, by being fully transparent, open to listening, authentic in the exchange of information, and supporting the facilitation of work groups, a historically bypassed neighborhood has been effectively engaged, and resident voice and leadership capacity has been amplified.

Residents are gaining momentum in the MLK Park neighborhood and it is our hope that all stakeholders can build upon this foundation. These neighbors have been committed to the process and have put an unprecedented amount of time and talent into creating viable solutions to improve quality of life for all people in the neighborhood. With additional resources, funding, and partnerships, the project can transition from development to execution. In order to improve the standard of living, health, wealth and happiness experienced by MLK neighbors, we must work together for greater community control.



Pictured Below: Senior neighbors and long-term residents participated in the Neighborhood Champion convening and shared their concerns about the vacant school on their block and private development without community knowledge or input affects the neighborhood.



MLK PARK NEIGHBORHOOD 2019/2021

ACTIVITY MATRIX

The work program in the MLK Park Neighborhood for the next 36 months will be:

MLK Park Neighborhood Work Group Title	Proposed Activity	Description	Potential Partners	Estimated Completion
<u>Park Improvements and Activation</u>	City Ordinance Park Signage / Dog Signage Installation	The City of Grand Rapids Parks Department will provide clear communication of park requirements and expectations to create and maintain a safe and secure park. The City will install Park Rules and Usage signage in MLK Park that displays park hours, city ordinances and other pertinent park use information.	City of GR Parks & Rec. Dept., MLK Park Neighborhood Association, Friends of GR Parks, GRPD	Projected completion date: Fall 2019
	Feasibility Study Committee	The Parks department will ensure community involvement in all phases of the Feasibility Study of the MLK Park Lodge. The committee should be comprised of at least 60% residents that will have a say in each part of the process. The Parks department will host and facilitate a minimum of four meetings where neighbors will select the consultant, meet with the team that wins the bid, discuss their findings and the costs associated with improvements and create a concept plan for the actual site. The group will also discuss fundraising options if additional funding is needed.	City of GR Parks & Rec. Dept., MLK Park Neighborhood Association, Friends of GR Parks, MLK Park Block Clubs, Isaac V. Norris & Associates	Projected completion date: Fall 2019
	MLK Park Maintenance Programming	Neighbors will work together to become involved in park maintenance and beautification to further the impact of planned park improvements. The Parks Dept. in conjunction with the Neighborhood Association, resident volunteers and other community stakeholders will implement immediate park maintenance programming that would involve completing group tasks like pulling weeds, tree trimming, painting pergolas at the pool and laying down mulch in flower beds to help beautify the park while building relationships between neighbors.	City of GR Parks & Rec. Dept., MLK Park Neighborhood Association, Friends of GR Parks	Projected completion date: Fall 2019

MLK Park Neighborhood Work Group Title	Proposed Activity	Description	Potential Partners	Estimated Completion
<u>Park Improvements and activation Continued</u>	MLK Park Activation Events	Activate MLK Park by creating new events based activities that will create active, regular, uses in the park on a monthly basis including the winter season. Potential Activations: Movies in the Park, concert series, farmers markets, Live Music / pop-up performances, etc. (See Appendix 12 for a full list of events from the Parks & Recreation department of summer/fall 2019 events.)	MLK Park Neighborhood Association – Neighbor Engagement Committee, Community Partners, Near Neighborhoods, City of GR Special Events Dept., GRPD, City of GR Parks & Rec. Dept.	Project initiation date: Summer / Fall 2019
	MLK Park Lodge Renovations	LONG TERM – Renovate the MLK Park Lodge to create a modernized, aesthetically pleasing community venue and rental facility that is safe and affordable for public use. Some key considerations for renovations include heating and cooling, natural lighting, Lead and other hazardous remediation, ADA compliance, and CPTED Principles.	MLK Park Neighborhood Association, City of Grand Rapids Parks & Recreation Dept.	Summer 2021 (pending Feasibility Study Results)
<u>Neighborhood Building</u>	Communications Plan	The Neighborhood Association will finalize its name, create a logo and develop a communications plan that outlines the goals and objectives for messaging, community awareness and expanded outreach. They will also launch a website for neighbors to access information related to meetings, upcoming events, and methods of contacting the association.	MLK Park Neighborhood Association, City of Grand Rapids Neighborhood Connectors, City of Grand Rapids, Hired Consultants	Fall 2019
	Neighborhood Tree Study	Conduct a study of the status of street trees in the neighborhood to identify those that need to be replaced or removed.	MLK Park Neighborhood Association, City of Grand Rapids Parks & Recreation Dept., Friends of GR Parks, Mayors Greening Initiative	Fall / Winter 2019
	Neighborhood Association Event Calendar	The neighborhood engagement committee and the neighborhood association will create an annual calendar of outreach and resident engagement for the neighborhood. This annual list will include activation events implemented by the MLK park Neighborhood Association and other community partners.	MLK Park Neighborhood Association, City of Grand Rapids Parks & Recreation Dept., Friends of GR Parks, Mayors Greening Initiative, Near Neighborhood Associations	Fall 2019

MLK Park Neighborhood Work Group Title	Proposed Activity	Description	Potential Partners	Estimated Completion
<u>Neighborhood Building Continued</u>	Community Trust Programming	Build positive relationships with the police in the neighborhood based on comradery and trust, including utilization of MLK Park for events and activities that will facilitate relationship building with neighbors and community stakeholders.	MLK Park Neighborhood Association, City of Grand Rapids Parks & Recreation Dept., Community Partners, GRPD, Near Neighborhoods	Spring 2020
	Age-In-Place Initiatives	Provide comprehensive resources for long-term residents of color and all neighbors to age in place. Some ideas include: providing bi-monthly presentations/outreach sessions by AAA, provision of community-wide "Build Out Blueprints" for home additions for the average bungalow or Dutch colonial, for free use by neighborhood residents and connect with community resources who provide home building services and other community stakeholders for materials and presentations about home improvement loans.	MLK Park Neighborhood Association, City of Grand Rapids	2020
	Parking Ordinances	Implement new street parking rules and regulations to ease parking challenges in the neighborhood for residents.	MLK Park Neighborhood Association, Mobile GR, Planning Dept., Private Donors, Various Community Partners	2020/2021
	Summer Youth Employment Programming	Create a summer youth program where teenagers in our neighborhood can work with local landscapers, the Parks Department and other professionals to increase beautification through collaborative action.	MLK Park Neighborhood Association, City of Grand Rapids Parks & Recreation Dept., Friends of GR Parks, Area Churches & Businesses	2020/2021

***The full list of Work Group Goals and Measures, including identification of key partners, recommended success measures, status and timeline are included under Appendix 7 and 9.

LESSONS LEARNED AND CONCLUSIONS

While the Quality of Life process draws components from our Area Specific Plan processes, the Quality of Life Study for Heartside, and other City-led engagement efforts, aspects of this process were unique to “meet MLK Park neighbors where they are” with a customized framework of community engagement. Specifically, our advisory committee wanted to explore ways to engage residents at a grassroots level, highlight resident diverse voice, and reach those traditionally left out of the process, such as senior citizens and long-term residents of color in the neighborhood.

The process began with an informal committee, including City of Grand Rapids staff from the Planning, Development & Design department and the Executive Office, Neighborhood Connectors, and the Parks & Recreation Department. The team decided to use a pre-existing process coined Quality of Life that included a steering committee, a series of community engagement meetings, formation of work groups, and the formulation of a short-format report. A three-month process was envisioned. However, the best planning processes are always those that are able to change based on iterative learning, neighbor feedback and constructive criticism from the community.

As the Executive Office prepared to begin community engagement, the committee identified the need to hire a facilitator who would connect with residents and have the ability to speak with a wide range of stakeholders. Latesha Lipscomb, a Community Engagement Project Manager in the Planning Department, was identified as the ideal candidate and joined the process in February of 2019. She would join the Neighborhood Connectors, some of which were once members of that community and that had been empowered to engage and lead their neighborhood back in 2017. Likewise, Matthew Downey and Ciarra Atkins were also brought onto the team to provide additional facilitation and technical expertise for formation of a neighborhood association. The value of collaborating with and lifting up leadership with ties to the community for engagement efforts like this cannot be understated. Because there is a history of mistrust between residents and the public sector, having the right leadership in place for authentic, inclusionary engagement is paramount for establishing working relationships based on transparency and trust.

Another important thing to note for better engagement is the need to incentivize participation. We knew this process would require some extra innovation in terms of getting neighbors of color we had not heard from before, so the City made sure to provide clear messaging that all events were free to attend and family-friendly. In order to remove barriers for participation, we offered childcare at events and provided a meal or snack depending on the time of day the event was being offered. During the process, the City also gave out swag and a few prizes to convey our appreciation for the neighbors’ dedication and participation. During the MLK Park Neighborhood Quality of Life Study we learned:

- A process like this requires a great deal from community participants in terms of their time and efforts. They do this without pay, so incentives were a small but important way to show gratitude for their contributions.
- Provision of meals was also a driver for many of the participants, we had families from the neighborhood that attended work group meetings as a group on a regular basis. There is also a culture of coming together around meals in the MLK Neighborhood, making events feel like an opportunity to both work and gather in fellowship with other neighbors.



- Another takeaway is the importance of capturing authentic community voice and understanding that the work does not need to be “translated” into professional jargon to be effective. In fact, retaining the voice of the community and reflecting this back throughout the process has generated an end product that the community owns as their work.
- A final takeaway is that to improve quality of life and obtain equitable outcomes in the neighborhood, residents deserve access and opportunity in their communities based on fairness and impartiality. In the past, the MLK Park neighborhood has not received the consideration or latitude needed from the City and other stakeholders for increased quality of life for all people who live and learn in the neighborhood. As the City continues to think about ways to design and develop Grand Rapids as a top-of-mind destination, it is important to engage neighbors equitably across the City. The future is now.



The City of Grand Rapids would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to every participant that made a positive contribution by freely giving your time, talent or treasure to the Quality of Life Study. We hope that this body of work is a reflection of your hard-work and dedication exemplified during this process.

THANK YOU!

- MLK Park Neighborhood
Advisory Committee

04

APPENDICES

This is a detailed street map of the Kalamazoo, Michigan area. The map features a grid of streets, with a blue line highlighting a specific boundary. The streets are labeled with names such as Eastern, Franklin, Adams, Hall, and Philadelphia. Key landmarks include the Kalamazoo Zoo and MLK Park. A north arrow is located in the top left corner. The map is oriented with North at the top.

APPENDIX 2

Neighborhood Vision Exercise Examples

VISION EXECRCISE

I envision the MLK Park Neighborhood
to be a place where...

WRITE A STATEMENT:

Community Center that has
these facilities and SERVICES:

- ① Health care + classes
- ② Senior citizens classes (Health Fitness)
- ③ Community Board = where the neighborhoods
OR neighbors could volunteer
their skills to help the
neighborhoods (Home repair
etc.)

④ Weekly or monthly issues that
affect the local neighborhoods
= 1

DRAW A PICTURE:

⑤ Seasonal Community Events
Winter =
Spring =
Summer =
Fall =

⑥ Youth Activities = Physical = Boxing
Educational = Tutor

DRAFT

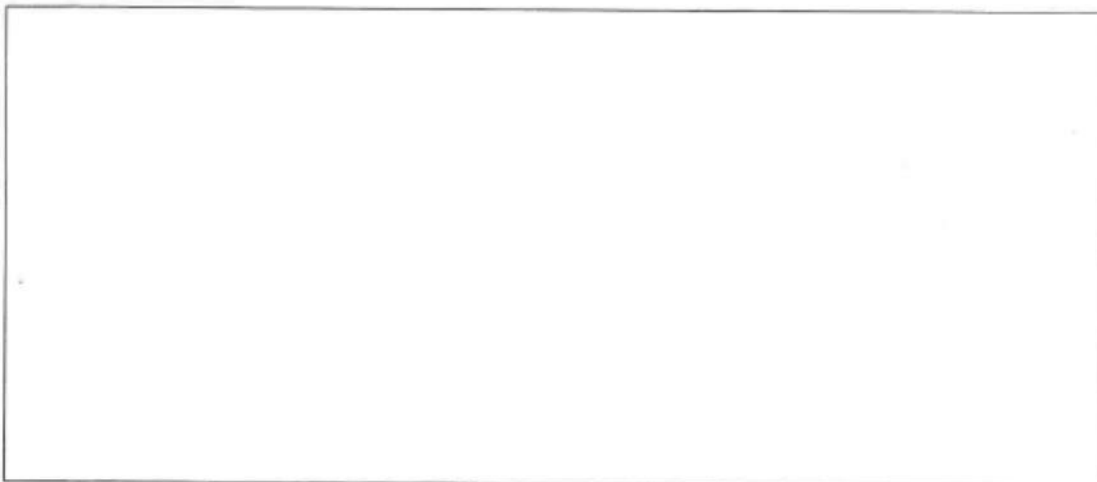
VISION EXECRCISE

I envision the MLK Park Neighborhood
to be a place where...

WRITE A STATEMENT:

I envision The MLK Park neighborhood TO be
Upgraded The park so that its modern and safe
Full of correct safety measures such as 911 Telephones
like The have on college campuses. Arrange more
Community gatherings To get Feedback From The
Community, better policing. Community Center
Resource Center.

DRAW A PICTURE:



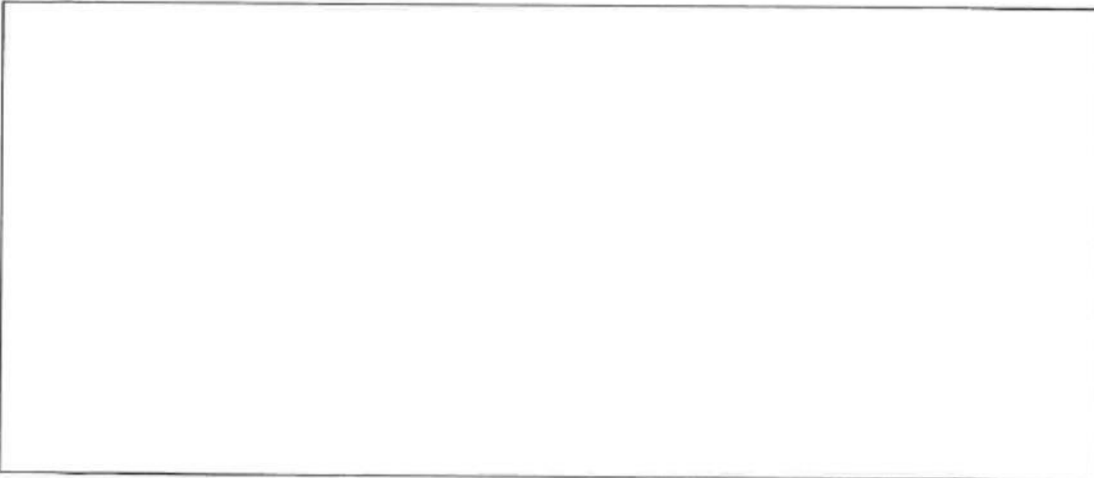
VISION EXECRCISE

I envision the MLK Park Neighborhood
to be a place where...

WRITE A STATEMENT:

- Walk to park on Weekends for legit farmers market.
- A place where kids ^(organized activities) can meet - especially since they all go to different schools - and a place where they all know (program?) adult. There is no continuity with Kids and "teachers". ^{Community officers Befriending Young People - know them by name.} There is safety in knowing people in your neighborhood.
- Keep boxing alive! Is Sigsbee school still GRPS property or private owned? Regardless, would they rent space to Golden Gloves to keep boxing in the neighborhood.

DRAW A PICTURE:



MLK PARK NEIGHBORHOOD

VISION EXERCISE

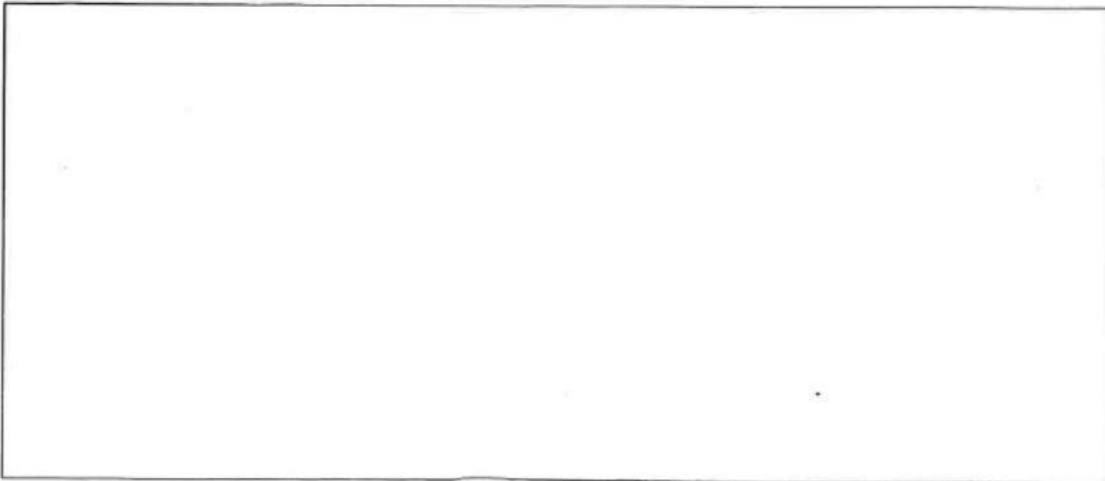
I envision the MLK Park Neighborhood
to be a place where...

WRITE A STATEMENT:

Neighbors are connected. Our older population
have stayed connected and are the heart of
our neighborhoods.

Park utilized for Events - City Projects
Clean-ups. All neighborhoods are
changing on a monthly basis New Residents
New owners + Renters. Yards are kept up
and Neighbors Care.

DRAW A PICTURE:



VISION EXERCISE

I envision the MLK Park Neighborhood
to be a place where...

WRITE A STATEMENT:

the many single female home owners feel that the city hears them. We are constantly having to advocate to keep current safety items in place. For example the light at Hall-Fuller is to keep traffic safe on surrounding streets & driveways, yet we had to sign petitions to keep it! Recognize we are mostly smaller units either no children or few yet constantly the city harps on about family friendly. Street landscaping is taken care of - if the homeowner doesn't agree to take it on as her/his responsibility then don't put it in or city budgets trust fund to take care of it. Streets safety & appearance changes your mindset when arriving home it influences your whole life.

DRAW A PICTURE:

Too many great neighbors have left due to bad street engineering making it too dangerous. By the way the city really should get the word out that most of the voting issues have been improved. We aren't so actively being disenfranchised. I haven't seen Jimmy Carter's Freedom Project at an election in some time.

Why does every city ordinance use 5000 ft²? It means our area where most are 4300 don't qualify only more expensive properties do

APPENDIX 3

MLK Park Neighborhood Work Group

Community Agreements

MLK PARK NEIGHBORHOOD QOL WORK GROUP COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

Community Agreements are expectations that participants in a workshop or meeting craft together and then agree to follow, in the effort to maintain a safe and respectful environment/experience. This list was crafted by MLK Neighbors that attended the first Quality of Life Improvement Study Work Group meeting at the MLK Park Lodge on March 20th, 2019.

1. Appreciate All Input
2. Agree to Disagree
3. Maintain RESPECT
4. Find Common Ground
5. Don't take it personal...
6. Stay Engaged
7. Listen to each other...
8. Be an active participant
9. No Videotaping is permitted in this space
10. No Personal Attacks
11. Fist to Five – Work Group Voting Method

APPENDIX 4

MLK Park Neighborhood Mini-Report



STRENGTHS

- Location (Proximity to Downtown, schools, near neighborhoods and business districts)
- Historical character of the neighborhood
- MLK Park – large, multi-use, has one of the few pools in the City
- Affordable large family homes
- Diversity of residents
- Easy access to transportation / Mobility
- Longtime home owners in the neighborhood
- Welcoming / Neighborly / Hospitable
- Talented people
- Historical context and solid foundation to build up resident voice and leadership capacity in the neighborhood.

THREATS

- We experience racism often.
- We want a neighborhood that doesn't have many empty houses or vacant spaces.
- We want neighbor and visitors to keep our community clean.
- Zoning changes, land use ordinances and development effect the way we live and learn.
- We want a neighborhood with curb appeal and well maintained streets.
- Drug activity and gun violence make the neighborhood unsafe for all people.
- Historical residents are being pressured to sell or being forced out of their homes.
- There is a lot of bad press about our neighborhood.
- We don't have a consolidated neighborhood identity.
- Development without neighbor engagement evokes displacements.

WEAKNESSES

- We lack RESPECT in our neighborhood.
- Negative stigma & community perception associated with our neighborhood.
- Gentrification
- Over-policing, police abuse of power, racial profiling and harassment
- Inability to activate neighbors to be involved.
- We don't feel safe.
- We are not unified and collaborative in our efforts.
- We experience high rates of crime and drug activity.
- We lack an economic presence that is reflective of neighbors.

OPPORTUNITIES

- We want to be a consistent voice and better advocates for ourselves.
- We want more opportunities to gather and fellowship with neighbors.
- Our teenagers and youth need something to do.
- We want to create a shared succession plan that builds legacy and preserves generational roots in our neighborhood.
- We need to be accountability partners for cleanliness, safety and responsible development.
- We want equitable information and access to Marijuana programming and business opportunities.
- We want to revive our Neighborhood Association and Neighborhood Watch status.
- The MLK Park lodge is not being used as intended and we want to activate the space for use by families in the neighborhood.
- We want leisure educational activities and opportunities to improve quality of life for all.
- Our elderly residents need regular wellness checks from neighbors.

APPENDIX 5

Community Engagement Tools



Figure: This image represents a myriad of statements from residents that reflect what they view as weaknesses that exist in the neighborhood. Some of the statements were selected from the SWOT Analysis sheets and converted into a poster for a reflection station during the Neighborhood Knowledge Exchange.



Figure: This image represents a myriad of statements from residents that reflect what they view as **threats** that exist in the neighborhood. Some of the statements were selected from the SWOT Analysis sheets and converted into a poster for a reflection station during the Neighborhood Knowledge Exchange.

What changes would make it better to live in the MLK Park Neighborhood?

These responses represent a variety of different themes involving people, relationships, institutions, infrastructure, economics, positive stories, culture, events and healthcare that neighbors felt all represent opportunities for improvement in the MLK Park Neighborhood. What do you think?

Please place five dots on the statements that resonate the most with you

We would benefit greatly from more community-wide educational activities in our neighborhood.
Adult education opportunities should be offered in our neighborhood.
We want more opportunities to host entrepreneurs and pop-up shops.
Our neighborhood would benefit from working collaboratively with near neighborhoods.
We want more community gardening programming and opportunities.
Neighborhood tournaments would be a great way to bring people together from the neighborhood.
We want to bring boxing back to the MLK Park Lodge.
Increased neighbor partnership would be great for the creation of a shared vision for the neighborhood.
Our children need something to do and would benefit from a Youth Community Action Board.
A welcome wagon initiative should exist in the neighborhood to properly welcome new neighbors.
We want a dog park with doggie bag station in our neighborhood.
We need to grow our Neighborhood Association.
We want a Big Brother/Sister program in our neighborhood to benefit the youth.
Latch Programming would be a great addition in our neighborhood.
We know that our senior neighbors are a valuable asset in our community and we need to incorporate wellness checks into our neighborhood culture.
Our neighborhood is in dire need of building community trust classes with GRPD.
Block mommas and poppas would serve our neighborhood well.
We need to educate ourselves to become better advocates for the changes we wish to see in our neighborhood.
We value opportunities to get to know our neighbors and want more opportunities for fellowship.
We need mentors from inside and outside of the neighborhood to volunteer to train the youth.
We would like to see more connections with near neighborhoods in the city.
We would like to improve our relationship with police officers by hosting events like Neighbor Night Out and Coffee with a Cop.
Our neighborhood would benefit greatly from having a Community Police Officer.
We want to host block parties regularly in the neighborhood.
Our neighborhood would benefit greatly from an opportunity to do some intentional Succession Planning for the purposes of legacy building with long-term residents.
We recognize that "we are the change we have been waiting for" and want to be better accountability partners one unto another.
We should institute Neighborhood Watch programming in our neighborhood.
We want more signage in our neighborhood.
We have an opportunity to be more diverse in our thoughts and welcoming of all people.
Caring for trees, flowers, and grass proactively increases curb appeal in the neighborhood.
MLK Neighbors need better communication and team work to improve quality of life for all
Our teenagers and youth need something to do.
We see an opportunity to apply Neighborhood Match Funds for event programming in our neighborhood.
Book sharing programs or little libraries would be an asset in our neighborhood.
Fireworks are a big problem in our neighborhood. We would like to learn more about legislation to know what acceptable behavior in our community is.
A Neighborhood Forum would be a great way to determine and advance our mutual interests.
We want more support from the police department, so that law enforcement is more accessible and less scary.
We desire to build better relationships with our elected officials and want to see them in the neighborhood they serve more often.
Coffee with a Cop programming would be a great benefit in our neighborhood.
We want to host family-friendly private events at the MLK Park Lodge.
We want to upgrade the MLK Park lodge with infrastructural changes needed to make the space accessible to neighbors.
We believe MLK Park is great asset in our community and we want to see better lawn care established in that public space.
The Neighborhood Association should be revitalized and housed in the MLK Park Lodge.

Figure: During the Quality of Life process participants were asked to provide feedback on what **changes** would make it better to live in the MLK Park Neighborhood. This figure represents some of the collective responses we received from neighbors during the initial phases of engagement.

What are the strengths of the MLK Park Neighborhood?

These responses represent a variety of different themes involving people, relationships, institutions, infrastructure, economics, positive stories and events that neighbors felt all make the MLK Park Neighborhood STRONG.

Would you agree? Please place three dots on the statements that resonate the most with you

The City of Grand Rapids has made some visible investments in the neighborhood.
Improvements in our neighborhood makes our community feel welcoming.
Our neighborhood is perceived to be safe and clean.
We live in a caring community with hospitable neighbors.
We value living in a family-friendly neighborhood.
Our neighborhood is strong because of its rich diversity.
We have a wide variety of long-term residents in our neighborhood.
Past community engagement in our neighborhood gives us a strong foundation to build upon.
We recognize that our neighborhood is resource rich with many different schools, churches, community centers and transportation options for neighbors.
Accessibility, walkability and mobility options are great in our neighborhood.
We value having an age-friendly neighborhood and want more opportunities to improve quality of life for our senior neighbors.
We appreciate that the MLK Park neighborhood is affordable for buyers and renters.
We have a few bakeries and one library.
Our neighborhood is full of talented, creative people.
The MLK Park Neighborhood is lively and always bustling with activity.
The MLK Park neighborhood is centrally located and very close to Downtown.
Gentrification has had some positive effects on the neighborhood.
We appreciate the diversity in gender, race, ethnicity and socio-economic status that exists in our neighborhood.
Our neighborhood has a rich history.
We value having a large multi-use park and lodge in our neighborhood.
We value having a public pool in our park.
Our neighborhood has large, single family homes at an affordable price.
We recognize the home ownership and the presence of long-term residents make our neighborhood strong.
The MLK Park neighborhood is in close proximity to several schools.
We work, volunteer and share our talents with others in the neighborhood.
We have good, quality homes built in our neighborhood.
We value different cultures, people and perspectives in our neighborhood.
We have a big park that is activated frequently in our neighborhood.
We work, volunteer, play and are residents in the MLK Park neighborhood.
The MLK Park neighborhood is a great place to raise a family.
Our neighborhood has big, beautiful trees.
The walkability and easy access to transportation in our neighborhood is a strength.
The MLK Park Lodge is a great asset in our neighborhood with endless possibilities for greater use.
We value the diversity that exists in our neighborhood.
The City of Grand Rapids (Neighborhood Connectors) is focused on collaborative efforts to improve quality of life in our neighborhood.
There is good communication amongst neighbors in our community.

Figure: During the Quality of Life process participants were asked to provide feedback on what are the ***strengths*** of the MLK Park Neighborhood. This figure represents some of the collective responses we received from neighbors during the initial phases of engagement.

DRAFT

APPENDIX 6

Recommended Park Improvement Images



Pictured Above: Residents have consistently expressed a need for irrigation in MLK Park to properly maintain the grass, trees and shrubs in the park. This photo was submitted by a resident to show that when the park landscape is not maintained, it makes activation of the space more challenging and less appealing to neighbors.



Pictured Above: One of the final recommendations of the residents in the MLK Park Neighborhood is that the City of Grand Rapids Parks Department conduct a study of the status of street trees in the neighborhood to identify those that need to be replaced or removed. Trees that are removed should be replaced with trees with appropriate growth potential and characteristics for a boulevard.



Figure: Signage in the Park was a big area of concern for the Park Improvements and Activation work group. There were a number of discussions around Park rules and resident understanding of City regulations. Residents expressed concerns over many different issues like pet waste, parking, hours of operation and way-finding all of which can be corrected with the implementation of new signage in multiple location in the park.

APPENDIX 7

Neighborhood Building Final Recommendations

DRAFT

DRAFT

APPENDIX 8

City of Grand Rapids MLK Park

Capital Investments

MLK Park Improvements and Engagement

Capital Investments (FY14-FY18)

Martin Luther King Park has received \$900,000+ in millage improvements since 2014. The work that was completed was focused on needed safety and asset management improvements – boiler replacement, roof repair, drinking fountain repair/replacement, sports courts repair and other general building repair work.

A chart of total millage investments by park is on page 2.

YEAR	PROJECT	EXPENSES
2014	Playground safety surfacing (wood fiber) and tree management/hazardous pruning	\$ 14,650
2015	Roof and boiler replacement General repair work at bathrooms, concessions, and pool house ¹ Rehab sports courts (8 tennis, 4 basketball); new goals and posts for bball court Water fountain replacements (pool concession building – wall mount (1), pool – pedestal (2), bball restroom – wall mount (1), tennis court – pedestal (1))	\$ 822,034
2016	Sports courts improvements, painting gym and bath house	\$ 42,024
2017	<i>Removal of wading pool; basketball court fencing²</i>	\$ 47,647
2017	Playground safety surfacing, various building improvements	\$ 1,265
2018	Design fees for 2019 improvements; ground cover	\$ 22,370
TOTAL		\$ 949,991

¹ 2015 general repair work – replaced exterior and interior doors and frames on concession building and bathroom buildings; replaced metal handrails to lodge; new sidewalk ramp to lodge; patch/repair wood siding to lodge; replaced corroded hangers of piping to waters slide

² General Fund improvement, not millage funding

2019 Improvements planned: \$100,000

New picnic shelter with tables, grill, and concrete walk

New decorative pedestrian lighting

Improved playground equipment – expression swing, toddler swing set, spinner

Bike racks (3)

Remaining dedicated funding for improvements at MLK Park: \$150,000

Millage funding - \$100,000

Lodge feasibility study - \$50,000

Park improvements this spring and summer are based on community input. We have met with the neighbors on 2 separate occasions to go over potential improvements they would like to see, which were:

1. Improved park lighting
2. Improved picnic areas
3. Adding a picnic shelter
4. Bathroom improvements (at pool, lodge or stand-alone bathroom by basketball court)
5. Playground improvements (new equipment)

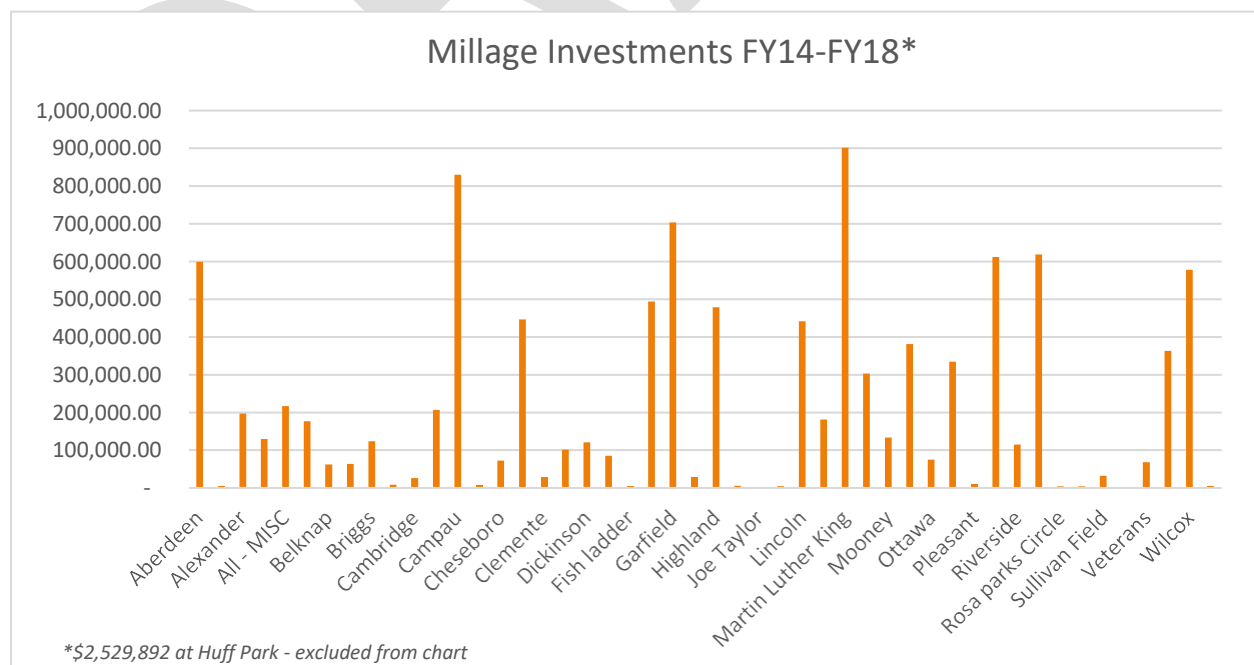
Community Listening Session #1 – May 10, 2017 (44 resident participants)

(Residents organized a follow up meeting at the lodge for 05/24 to discuss summer activation in the park)

Community Listening Session #2 – June 14, 2017 (17 resident participants)

Final community meeting – October 11, 2017 (21 resident participants)

Project Communication: 1,200+ postcards were sent out to residents surrounding the park (boundary roughly Sherman, Ethel/Iroquois, Hall, and Neland – see MLK_Addresses_Map.pdf), along with park signs, flyers, website, and Facebook posts. Emails were sent out for the second and third meetings.



APPENDIX 9

Park Improvements & Activation

Final Recommendations

DRAFT

DRAFT

APPENDIX 10

Future State of MLK Park Lodge Results

THE FUTURE STATE OF THE MLK PARK LODGE RESULTS

The official lease agreement for the boxing program at MLK Park Lodge ended a few years ago. Through the Quality of Life process many neighbors have expressed an interest in permanently removing the boxing ring out of the Park Lodge. Neighbors have expressed great interest in renovating the lodge to create a modernized, aesthetically pleasing community venue and rental facility that is safe and affordable for public use. Do you agree that the boxing ring should be removed so the lodge can be used as a multi-purpose rentable space?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Total = 30 Votes	Total = 3 Votes	Total = 6 Votes	Total = 0 Votes	Total = 31 Votes

THE FUTURE STATE OF THE MLK PARK LODGE RESULTS

Some neighbors have expressed an interest in using this space for family reunions, community classes, baby showers, repast celebrations and as place to house the neighborhood association. What type of uses would you like to see take place in this space in the future?

1. <u>Multi-Purpose Space (3)</u> 2. Get Out To Vote Meeting Space 3. Baby Showers, Graduation Parties, Dance Classes & Neighborhood Parties. 4. <u>Community Center(5)</u> 5. Karate 6. African American <u>Youth</u> Center 7. Knitting Neighbors 8. Repass Facility 9. Farmers market 10. Community Meeting Space 11. Church Services 12. Rentable Facility for Baby Showers etc. 13. Safe Space for <u>Youth</u> 14. Neighborhood Association Meetings 15. Voting Site 16. Gym 17. Neighborhood Parking Lot 18. <u>Block</u> Club Meeting Space	19. Boxing Ring GO! 20. <u>Event Center (2)</u> 21. Neighborhood Association Come back. 22. Ring Staying / <u>Youth</u> Program 23. Yoga 24. <u>Youth</u> Space (Mentoring) 25. <u>Block</u> Parties 26. Community Meetings / Programming 27. Fitness Classes 28. E-Sports 29. Folk School 30. Social Festivities 31. Community Gatherings / <u>Block</u> Parties / <u>Block</u> Mtgs. 32. Gym 33. Kids Fun in Park Day 34. Tae Bo 35. Food Truck Parking 36. Shelter	37. Safe Activities for our <u>youth</u> 38. After School Programming 39. Meeting Area 40. Sports / Wellness Classes 41. Fashion Shows 42. Reunions 43. Emergency Homeless Shelter for <u>Youth</u> 44. Training Facility 45. Gymnastics
--	--	--

APPENDIX 11

Sample Predatory Solicitation Letter

REDACTED

Grand Rapids, MI 49507

Dear Angela **REDACTED**

My name is Jeremy with the Hometown Development Company, located here in Ada, Michigan. We are searching for property to buy in your area and I noticed your property located at **Franklin St SE in Grand Rapids**. Are you interested in selling it?

We buy property in any condition or situation, offer cash and we can close quickly. Selling property to us is the easiest way to sell and means that you pay no real estate commissions, sell your house as-is and close on a date and place of your choosing.

Our goal is to be an honest and fair company and to improve the neighborhoods that we love throughout West Michigan. We understand that every situation is different, and we pride ourselves on coming up with custom solutions to fit sellers' unique situations. If selling is not something you are interested in, but you know someone who is, please tell them about us!

If you are curious and would like to hear more about our process, send us an email, or call or text 616- and we'd be happy to talk. We can also put you in touch with people we have purchased from in the past so that you can hear about their experience with us, if you'd like.

Sincerely,

REDACTED

REDACTED

Our Mission

1) Responsibly Buy Houses

Our goal is to improve the neighborhoods we love throughout West Michigan by buying houses in a fair and responsible manner and then renovating them to bring them to their fullest potential. We aim to make the home selling process as streamlined and stress-free for you as possible. We offer flexible solutions to sell your home and understand that each situation is unique. We strive to respectfully tailor our process to best suit you and your family.



REDACTED

2) Build and Restore Beautifully Crafted Homes

We are extremely passionate about construction, design and renovating thoroughly in order to create safe, warm and inviting homes to last for generations to come.



5/5 Stars on Facebook



A Few of Our Satisfied Customers



"This company is beyond amazing! Thank you guys. We are forever grateful for what you've done for us. It means so much."

— Celena from Grand Rapids, MI



"I had a great experience with Hometown Development Company. We had no idea what to do with this home because it needed so much work. They bought the house for a fair price within just a few weeks. They made the process so easy and they were very friendly to work with."

— Debra from Rockford, MI



"I had a very positive experience with Jeremy and his team. I had recently moved out of state and needed to sell my house that needed work. I felt the offer was fair given the condition of my home. The process was easy and I closed out of state."

— Robin from Tennessee



5/5 Stars on Facebook



Licensed Contractor



Licensed Builder
Licensed Real Estate Agent



All closings through Bell Title Company
3351 Eagle Run Dr NE Suite C,
Grand Rapids, MI 49525
Meghan Vandenhout •616-942-8955

APPENDIX 12

MLK Park Neighborhood

- Events and Activation Guide
 - Park and Recreation Department List of Events
-

MLK PARK NEIGHBORHOOD EVENTS AND ACTIVATION

Community Priorities

- Absentee Landlords
- Housing Security
- Neighborhood Streets (Conditions & Maintenance)
- Trees / Upkeep / Curb Appeal
- Trash Cans / Dog Poop Stations
- Beautification of MLK Park (Watered Grass)
- Lighting
- Parking (MLK Park Lot, Resident Stickers, Parking Programs, Visitor Parking, etc.)
- Predatory Soliciting - Harassment of historical residents who are home owners.)
- Relationship Building (GRPD, Community Police Officers, Neighbors as accountability partners.)
- Regular MLK Park Activation

Project Ideas

- Health Awareness Campaign or Large Scale event
- Additional Points to consider: Diet, Mental Health, Aging in Place, overall wellness. Tie-in our event with pre-existing campaigns, mailings, posters, neighborhood newsletter, event series, walking club, summer aerobics, etc.
- Community Blue-print for Build-Outs for homes in the neighborhood created with architects and available for all neighbors to use.
- Movies in the Park Series (Food Trucks, Music, Activities, Etc.)
- Community Survey

MLK Park Neighborhood Activities 2019 summer/fall

- Swimming Pool open/Swim Lessons – June 3-August 18
- MLK Summer Day Camp M-F (10 am-3 pm) June 3-August 9
- Water Safety Day – June 22 in pool/park (tentative time 11 am – 3 pm)
- Free Community Yoga in the Park – Thursdays, 7:15-8 pm (June 20-Aug. 22)
- Movies in the Park, July 20 – 7-11 pm (Friends of GR Parks)
- Parks and Rec Youth Tennis Lessons – June 10-July 26
- YMCA Inner City Baseball Program – M-Thurs., June 10-Aug. 8
- Project 1 (ArtPrize) – September/October

***Annual activities but organization hasn't confirmed usage yet:

SE Farmer Market – Typically Saturdays

Urban League Park Party

Youth Basketball Leagues

Crosscourt Tennis

APPENDIX 13

Media, Press Coverage and Web Links

MLK Park Neighborhood Quality of Life Study: Celebration announces action steps

SHARE     



Media, Press Coverage and Web Links

- <https://www.rapidgrowthmedia.com/devnews/060619MLKqol.aspx>
- <https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Our-City/News-Media/Community-to-celebrate-MLK-Park-Neighborhood-Quality-of-Life-Study>
- <https://www.wzzm13.com/article/news/community/mlk-park-neighborhood-to-celebrate-life-study-completion/69-6e8bc0b6-49bb-4651-90cc-e5b7431a4209>

- <http://www.grnow.com/event/mlk-park-neighborhood-quality-of-life-study-celebration/>

DRAFT

DRAFT